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WIDE AWAKE

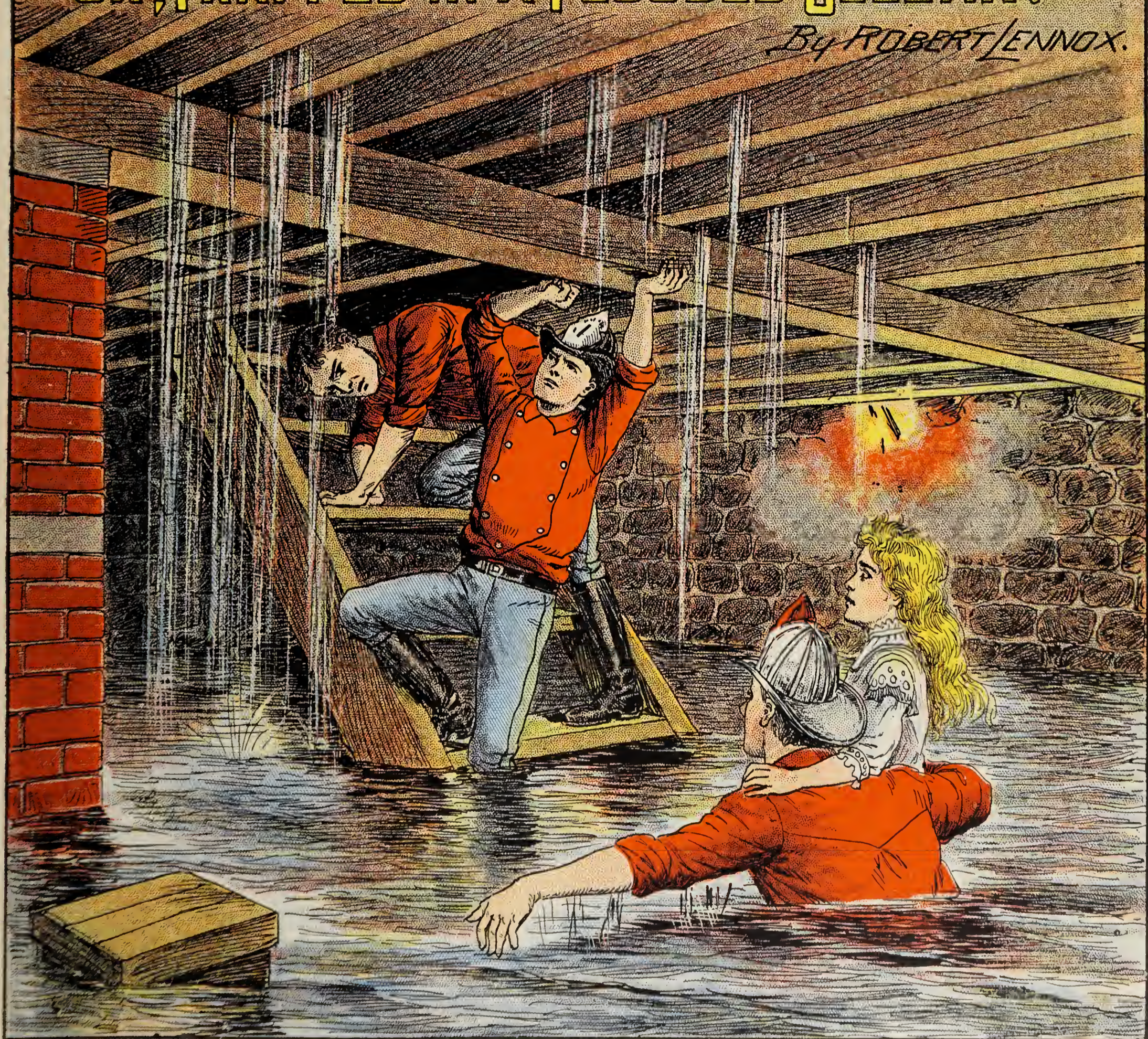
A COMPLETE
STORY

WEEKLY.

EVERY
WEEK.

YOUNG WIDE-AWAKE'S STRUGGLE IN THE DARK; OR, TRAPPED IN A FLOODED CELLAR.

By ROBERT LENNOX.



Holding the girl with one arm, Wide waded through the water fast flooding the cellar. The two boys on the ladder were striving with desperate energy to force up the trap-door, but it stoutly resisted their efforts.

WIDE AWAKE WEEKLY

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Young Wide Awake's Struggle in the Dark

OR,

TRAPPED IN A FLOODED CELLAR

By **ROBERT LENNOX**

CHAPTER I.

NEW MEANNESS FROM THE NEPTUNES.

"Well, Wide, we have been pretty successful in fixing that Parsons gang, haven't we?" asked Hal Norton, the clever young lieutenant of the Washington Fire Company.

The Parsons crowd of which he spoke controlled the rival volunteer company of Belmont, the Neptunes, and the struggle between them and the Washington boys was intense and bitter.

"I only hope it will hold them for a while," said Young Wide Awake, whose real name was Dick Halstead. He was the captain of the Washingtons, and was beloved by all who knew him for his winning manner and his bravery and ability.

"We shure fixed thim at thot loonitic fire, didn't we?" asked an Irish lad of the company, Terry Rourke, who was a close and faithful friend of Wide's.

"Yes, and we ought to celebrate that, and I have a scheme," said Dick. "It will be great, and I know will make a hit with the girls."

"What is it?" asked Joe Darrell. "A party?"

"No," said Dick, "you're wrong there."

"Well, what then?" demanded the other boys impatiently.

"Gee! But you are an impatient bunch!" said Wide with a laugh.

"Well, you are a slow-poke when it comes to telling your schemes," said Hal indignantly. "If you don't hustle we'll refuse to go."

"No, you won't, when I tell you," said Dick. "Well, to cut a long story short, it's just this: the girls have been entertaining us a lot, and have given us no end of parties and that sort of thing."

"You're right, Wide. We ought to pay back a little," interrupted Joe.

"Yes, we ought. Well, my plan, boys, is to give them a picnic down in the country near Bush's Mill. We've never taken them down there, and it is very pretty there, and a fine ride. What do you say to a hay ride down there?"

"Great!" shouted the boys gleefully. "We're right with you, Dick!"

"Yis, Wide," said Terry Rourke, bound to have his little joke, "straws and hay show which way we want to go!"

"That'll do for you, you joker—you haven't a bit of respect in you for any American things, not even for so serious a proposition as a hay ride party!" and Wide made as if he was very angry.

"What'll we do about any fires while we're gone?" asked Sam Bangs, the fat youth of the company.

"We can ask Chief Pelton about it, and surely he will assign the old company, the Torrents, to our territory for the day," answered the young captain.

"Sure, he will," said Hal. "Just yesterday he was talking to me down at the drug-store on the corner, and said that we had done enough to earn a vacation and a raise in salary."

"Yis—if he doubles our salary we won't mind," said Terry with a grin. "Neither would the city treasurer, for twict nothing is nothing! 'Tis a fine schedule av pay!"

"Well, we earn that schedule a great deal better than a

lot of the regular officials. That's no joke!" said Tommy Grogan.

"Then, if it's a go, I'll 'phone the chief and ask for next Saturday off, and we'll tell the girls about it. Eh, boys?"

"You bet, Dick. It makes a hit with us, that plan of yours!" answered Hal, and all preparations were made.

Chief Pelton, who had charge of the entire volunteer fire department of Belmont, was only too glad to let the boys off for a day.

"You bet I'll let you go, Dick," said he. "I'll put the Torrents on your territory while you're gone, and if there is a fire I'll turn out myself with a bucket and a dipper, if need be. You boys deserve a lot of credit for your faithful work these last few months."

"Thank you very much, chief—we need a little rest," said Wide, "for we've been fighting even worse things than fire, and we aren't through with them yet!"

"You mean that Parsons layout! Well, that's right. If those Neptune boys try any tricks while you're away I'll make it warm for them. I am not prejudiced, for I am chief of the whole department, but I'm tired of these mean, snide tricks which they are doing so much of late."

Saturday morning bright and early the Washington boys all met down at Jenkins' livery stable and climbed "aboard" the great big hay-wagon which had been brought in from the country for their special use.

"That's big enough for a regiment of soldiers," said Hal as they climbed up.

"You'll find it is not so roomy as you think, after we're all on," replied Dick, and he was right.

However, they were all comfortable, and the happy, chattering girls were helped up with laughs and jolly jokes, when they reached the Lester house, where they were to meet.

Anita's mother went along as chaperon to the party and she entered into the fun like a young girl herself.

"Kitty, you are to be boss of this party," said Dick to his pretty little sweetheart, as he gallantly gave her a mount with his hands at his knee, just as the hostler does to a horsewoman.

"Very well, then," said the charming girl, her eyes bright with happiness at being with Dick again, "you will have to be a very good boy, or you'll get a lot of demerits in the class."

"Which way are we going, Dick?" asked Anita Duroc, sitting by Joe Darrell.

"Down the river road, Anita," said Wide, "into one of the prettiest country districts you ever saw. We are going to Bush's Mill, an old water mill, and then we'll lunch around there some place."

"Dick, I'd rather lunch in the woods," said Kitty. "If we're going out into the woods let's eat there, too, and have it real country picnic fashion. I don't like any old tumble-down mill."

"Well, we can decide later, when we get there," answered Wide.

The girls laughing and chattering merrily, and the boys keeping pace with their gayety, the big wagon rumbled down the shady streets of Belmont.

Every store and house that they passed seemed to have some friend of the Washingtons within, for heads were

stuck out of doors and windows and everybody waved and cheered them.

The boys of the company were very popular for the good work they had done, and now they received a proof of it. You can imagine the lusty cheers in which they replied, tooting horns at the same time, and making the welkin ring generally.

"There are two friends of yours, Dick," said Kitty Lester. "Look over there to the right!"

Dick Halstead did look and beheld the unpleasant faces of Fred Parsons and Gerald Keating.

Parsons was the son of the well-known insurance man of Belmont, and was captain of the Neptunes. His companion, Keating, was his intimate friend, also a Neptune. Between the two of them they always managed to give the Washingtons more trouble than all the fires in Belmont.

The two fellows looked at the happy party with envious looks.

"They're whispering some meanness, I'll bet," said Hal as he saw the two mumbling to each other and watching with scowls the progress of the jogging hay-wagon.

They were standing in the front yard of Gerald Keating's house. Suddenly an idea seemed to strike them, for Fred Parsons laughed and Keating dashed into the open basement door, which was on the side of the house.

By this time the hay-wagon and its jolly passengers were just passing the Keating residence.

None of the boys spoke to Parsons and he said never a word of greeting to the girls even, but just stood scowling, hatred showing in every feature.

As the wagon went past Keating rushed out again with some object in his hands, and laughing with glee.

By this time the wagon had reached the corner and was just turning down to proceed towards the country river road, and was about fifty feet past Keating's house.

Keating ran out on to the pavement, followed by Parsons, and was seen to have a long pink object in his hand, looking like a stick.

"What sort of monkey business is this?" wondered Dick, who had kept his eyes on them, although the rest of the crowd had changed their attention to pleasanter subjects by now.

Suddenly he saw to his amazement Fred Parsons strike a match on a safety box which he quickly pulled out of his side pocket and hold it to the end of the apparent stick.

Frrrrttttt! A few sparks began to drop off the end of the pink stick. It sparked more and more until a shower of sparks was pouring from the end.

"Great Scott! It's a Roman candle!" exclaimed Dick. "They must have heard we were coming this way and provided themselves with the fireworks and laid in wait for us."

As he spoke the sparks of the candle were directed toward the hay-wagon, with its load of girls and boys, just swinging around the corner.

Ssssszzzt! Crack!

The fire-balls from the Roman candle began to shoot out of the end. Now Dick understood the dastardly purpose of the two Neptunes.

They were trying to set fire to the hay on the wagon from long distance, as it were.

Crack! Ssszzt!

The girls now saw the rain of fire-balls coming toward

them and screamed, for they saw that the hay would ignite if one of the burning pieces of chemical hit it.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Fred Parsons, doubling up with glee at his villainous scheme. "Good shot, Gerald!"

It was indeed a good shot, for the last ball in the Roman candle had struck its mark and the hay was blazing up in a moment.

The girls screamed and the boys, quick as a flash, whipped off their coats and were beating out the flames in the dry hay.

But Young Wide Awake knew that his trusted Washingtons could fight the fire and he leaped off the wagon on another errand.

"I'll teach them to fight girls, the cowards!" he muttered wrathfully to himself. He rushed towards the Neptunes, who did not expect such a move.

They thought that the Washingtons, including Dick, would all be kept busy putting out the burning hay-wagon. But Dick rushed on.

The two fellows turned away with a laugh, and Gerald Keating vaulted over his fence into his own yard.

Fred Parsons had no chance to get away, however, for Dick rushed him with such speed that the captain of the Washingtons was upon the Neptune in a wink of an eye.

"You cowardly sneak! I'll teach you to play such tricks on girls!" cried Dick. "You haven't respect for women or anything else!"

"Don't you try to bluff me, Dick Halstead! You go back to your crowd of little girls—all you do is to run with a crowd of girls, who jolly you along until you think you are the real little hero. Huh!" and Fred's face was dark with unconcealed hatred.

"You can't get any nice girls to let you come around them," said Dick, and the remark went home, for the truth of it was a sore point with the Neptune captain.

"You've got to come out and apologize to those girls for your dirty act!" said Dick threateningly. "If you don't you'll get the worst licking you've had in years."

"Run along, run along with your little girl friends!" jeered Gerald Keating from the other side of the fence.

Fred Parsons started towards the fence to leap over it and join the speaker.

But Dick had had enough of this, and he rushed the Neptune and caught him a stunning blow on the shoulder, for Parsons ducked just as our hero struck, thereby saving his head.

"You will try that!" cried Fred, whirling around with cat-like quickness, for he had been learning a few fighting tricks lately from Brick Houston, a Neptune who was considered one of the best scrappers in Belmont.

Biff! And with surprising agility Parsons landed a return compliment straight on Dick Halstead's face, swinging it from the side.

Dick staggered back from the force of the painful and unexpected move, and Fred was quick to follow his advantage.

"Fix him, quick, Fred!" yelled Gerald from the yard, starting to climb over the fence. "I'll help you, and we'll fix the cur for good!"

The Washingtons, by this time out of sight around the corner, were busy fighting the fire in the hay-wagon with

their usual skill, but handicapped by the absence of any instruments.

They were ignorant of their young captain's fix, and it looked bad for Dick Halstead.

Parsons' blow had drawn the blood from his nose, and Gerald Keating had picked up a loose fence paling as an instrument of war.

The two boys closed in on our young hero, and it seemed as if at last they had their longed-for opportunity to wreak a lasting revenge upon the gallant young fire-fighter.

But there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and lip!

CHAPTER II.

DICK TROUNCES TWO NEPTUNES.

"Take that, you cur!" hissed Gerald Keating as he swung the heavy fence paling at the head of Young Wide Awake, but the Washington youth saw the directed blow out of the corner of his eye, and dodged instinctively.

The blow glanced off his uplifted arm, and as he had his coat on it really did not hurt him because of the slant of the arm, while Dick sprang back against the fence.

Here he had his assailants both in front of him, and thus gained an advantage.

"Rush him!" yelled Fred Parsons. "His gang will be here in a minute!"

"We'll fix him before they come!" answered Gerald Keating, and the two closed in on him again.

Biff! biff! Two blows in succession were delivered by the furious Neptunes, but Dick's agility aided him and he warded them off. Another strong blow was landed on the side of his cheek by Parsons, who was putting up a fast fight.

"Ugh!" and Dick had handed Gerald Keating a far from gentle tap in the floating ribs which made that young gentleman gasp painfully for breath and retire for a minute or so to catch up with his own breathing.

There is one place just below the ribs which is a great spot for fighters, and Gerald's over-sureness had given Dick his chance.

But Fred Parsons was wasting no time, and he rushed our hero again, this time having grabbed up the fence paling which Gerald had used before. His arm was upraised to bring it down on our friend's head, but Dick did not wait for the blow.

He leaped directly at Fred, as Gerald stood aside for that instant. His two hands were aimed differently, and the tactics confused Fred. One hand opened up and caught the Neptune captain a furious smack in the face, the other hand grasped the descending cudgel.

Fred instinctively tried to hold on to the stick, and yet his other arm flew up to the face which was so painfully slapped. For an open-handed blow hurts sometimes more than a direct punch.

"I knew that would fool him," thought Wide as he saw his stratagem succeed, and he wrenched the stick suddenly out of the Neptune leader's grasp.

Gerald now leaped toward our hero, but was unguarded again, and with his free hand Dick Halstead let the fellow

have a straight-arm blow on the chin which toppled him over.

"I'll fix you, you cur!" grunted Fred Parsons, and he raised his heavily-booted foot for a sudden vicious kick, but it was a move which cost him the battle.

For just as he did so our young hero sprang aside, while at the same instant Dick swung with all the strength of his good right arm and brought that fence paling down across the Neptune's shin with a resounding blow.

"Ouch!" screeched Fred, toppling over and grasping his knee and shin, groaning fearfully. "You've broken my leg, you coward!"

"I'll break your head in a minute!" cried Dick, and he directed a terrific kick at the fellow as he sprawled, half sitting.

Biff! It landed fair and square, and almost lifted the Neptune from the ground.

Gerald had risen again, but it was noticeable that he was not as anxious to meet our hero, who was by this time wielding the fence paling most scientifically.

With his left hand Dick tried to land another on the Keating fellow's face, but that youth turned precipitously and fled into his yard.

Fred Parsons scrambled to his feet, and was rewarded for his pains by another vigorous football kick from Dick.

Parsons rushed into the yard, too, and Dick was after him.

Just then Mrs. Keating ran to the front door, and seeing the excitement, opened it, and Gerald rushed inside and peered out from behind her.

"You young ruffian!" she cried. "I'll have you arrested! What do you mean by attacking my son and his friend?"

"He is a cur!" yelled Keating from the recess of the hall. "He attacked Fred and me with that club, and had no provocation at all!"

"That's right, Mrs. Keating; you ought to have him arrested!" said Fred Parsons.

"Well, of all the gall I ever heard of in my life!" gasped Dick. "See here, madam," said he, "you better keep your little boy in his own yard after this or he'll get arrested for incendiarism. He tried to burn up a lot of innocent girls just a few minutes ago, and then he and that cowardly sneak, Fred Parsons, both jumped on me with a club!"

"It's a contemptible lie!" cried the mother, with all a parent's faith in her own. "I'll have a warrant sworn out for you!"

"If you do I'll prosecute your son and have him landed in jail!" said Wide. "He's a coward and afraid to come out from behind your apron-strings!"

"You have no witnesses!" said Mrs. Keating. "I think this is a deliberate plot!"

"You bet it was!" cried Hal Norton, who came running up just then. They had put out the fire on the wagon and the Washingtons rushed back to look for their commander.

"What did you do to the mothers' darlings, Wide?" asked Joe, laughing at the two fellows standing in the hallway by the side of Mrs. Keating.

"I drove them to the shelter of their own firesides," said Wide with a laugh, leaving the yard.

"You are a crowd of rough, ill-bred ruffians," cried Mrs. Keating, "and I'll report you to the chief of police!"

"Don't you worry about that, mum," said Terry Rourke; "you'll have a swate job av it before long tryin' to git the chief av police to let your little darlint out av his gilded cage. He'll have the chief av police lookin' after him, nivver ye mind that, begorra!"

The Washingtons turned away, for they were courteous fellows and did not care to wrangle with women.

"We'll get even with you lobsters!" yelled the two Neptunes in one voice, shaking angry fists after our friends.

"Back to your marbles, little boys," said the jolly young captain; "you had better stick to marbles and tops, 'cause you'll burn your fingers with fireworks!"

The Washingtons laughed and hastened to the wagon around the corner.

"A pretty job, boys, after all!" said Wide admiringly, for the boys, by dint of clever work, had saved most of the hay and their trip was not really interfered with.

"Climb up and tell us about your battle, Dick," ordered the captain's pretty little sweetheart with pride.

"There's not much to tell. Let's be getting on towards Bush's Mill before we have any more excitement here," said Dick.

"All right—they're off!" yelled the boys, taking running jumps on to the hay, and in a jiffy they were off on their trip through the country.

Dick told, modestly, as was his custom, the account of his tussle, amid many sympathetic groans from the boys and "ahs!" from the girls.

"Dick," said Hal, "it's getting so that those fellows get theirs every time they try any cussedness. I'd think they'd stop for a while."

"Not their kind," said Wide; "those two boys are just naturally mean, and, like snakes, they can't change their natures. They'll keep it up and do worse and worse until finally they get landed somewhere. You mark my words!"

"Well, it's about time they landed, then, for the good of the community. They don't do as much good fighting fires as they do in stirring up trouble," said Joe Darrell.

"That's right; but let's don't worry about them. We are here on a sort of holiday trip, all of us, and I propose that we forget all our troubles and enjoy life."

The rest all agreed with Dick, and they had a happy, jolly ride, singing songs together.

The boys were very good at singing quartette parts together, and they brought many a burst of applause from the girls after especially well-sung verses of "Sywanee River," "Old Black Joe," and others of the songs which will never grow stale in America.

The old tumble-down Bush's Mill was reached after a couple of hours' pleasant driving, and the boys and girls hastened to explore the old structure, which was a relic of olden times when steam was hardly heard of.

"Be careful down there, girls!" called Dick to two of the party who had clambered down toward the mill dam and were sitting venturesomely on the rickety structure.

He turned away to look at some of the old machinery still left in the mill, and was pointing out the uses of the wheels to Kitty.

"See that, Kitty? That wheel there is turned by this rod, which is connected with the water-wheel. Now, they must have had a leather belt here where——"

He never finished his sentence, for a piercing scream rang out.

Dick rushed to the window of the mill, for he was on the second story with Kitty, and he glanced out in the direction of the frightened cry.

Another girlish scream was heard.

"What is it, Dick?" cried Kitty in fright.

"Holy smoke! Those girls are in! That woodwork caved in, as I told them it would!"

The two girls, sure enough, had fallen into the deep waters of the mill pond, and the eddying currents were whirling them round as they sank.

CHAPTER III.

DANGERS BY FIRE AND WATER.

"Oh, they're lost!" cried Kitty. "It's Faith Vane and Marjorie Kent!"

The other Washingtons near rushed to the windows to see, and the rest of the girls screamed, adding to the turmoil.

Young Wide Awake, ever on the jump in time of need, kicked off his shoes, and throwing his coat and cap aside took a flying leap from the second-story window.

Down he soared like a swallow and struck the water head-first with a beautiful dive.

In he went, for the mill pond was deep, and a second later came to the surface sputtering.

The two girls came up for the second time several feet away, and Wide struck out for them.

Another form darted through the air, and this time the Washingtons were indeed startled.

For it was no other than Sam Bangs, the fat boy of the aggregation.

Sam was a heavyweight of many pounds, but he could swim like a duck, as is often the case with fat folks, and he took a dive which rivaled that of Dick Halstead.

Another and yet another of the boys took flying dives, Hal from the dam level below, and Terry from the second-story window, and in a jiffy four of the gallant Washingtons had grabbed the drowning girls.

They were just in the nick of time, for the poor youngsters were sinking for the third and fatal time.

But Dick's quick action had saved the day.

Both girls struggled desperately and clung to their rescuers, clutching them around the necks, by the hair, any old place that a grip could be obtained.

"It's lucky there are so many of us!" gasped Dick, struggling with Marjorie, as she gouged at his eyes in her frantic choking endeavor to save herself, as all drowning persons act.

"Here, I'll give you a lift," said Tommy, holding on to the woodwork of the mill wall, as the boys reached up first one, then the other of the rescued girls.

Faith and Marjorie were soon up on the dry floor of the old mill, and fortunately had been dragged out before it was necessary to roll them on a barrel or do any of the other strenuous rescue stunts known to experts.

"Dick, you are not only a fire-fighter, but you are a won-

der as a water-fighter, too!" said his little sweetheart with a proud look in her eyes.

"We've all had so much experience with Neptune that scrapping water comes easy," said Dick, remembering his school studies in Latin.

"That's a bad joke, but you deserve a sweet kiss for it," said his little girl, "and I don't even mind your being so dripping wet, either!"

Dick got his kiss—and he returned the favor with interest. The rest of the boys cheered, and the girls laughed, and they were all mighty happy because of the pleasant ending of what looked at first like a tragedy.

"Now for the lunch," said Sam Bangs, whose bath had not injured his appetite. "I am nearly starved—hungry as a deacon when they have fried chicken for dinner at the county fair!"

"Sam, I never knew you when you weren't that hungry—or worse," said Joe with a laugh.

"Sam is sure the prize eater of the Washingtons," said Wide. "Some day when we get called to a pie factory Sam will just eat his way through and the fire will have to die down of its own accord, as there won't be anything left to burn."

Sam laughed, for he was used to this teasing and really enjoyed it.

"I don't ever see any canary bird appetites on you fellows, so you can't guy me very well," said the fat youth with a laugh.

The dainty lunch was ready for spreading on the floor of the old mill when Kitty put in an objection.

"I'd much rather eat down in the woods near here, wouldn't you, girls?"

"Yes, yes, it would be so romantic," said the girls.

"Well, I prefer the dry floor, with a table-cloth stretched across it, to the romantic wet ground with grasshoppers, and bugs, and ants all taking part in the banquet, too." Joe was not crazy about rural ways.

"So do I, Joe," said Wide, "but as this picnic is strictly for the girls we've got to give in, so let's drive down the road about a mile where the big woods start. Then we can get off and carry the grub in a piece."

"All right, Wide," said Hal. "I know a dandy little glen down there, with a spring in the middle. It's as rugged as the Rocky Mountains almost, with a big cliff back of it."

"Fine!" cried the girls, and the boys grabbed up the baskets and put them on the wagon. The picnickers divided up, some walking along the shadowy old lane, and others riding.

After about a mile's progress Hal called a halt.

"Now, we go down that path, straight into the woods, and it's a walk of another mile or maybe a little more."

"What's the use of all this fussing about? Let's eat and get through with it!" said fat Sam plaintively.

"There you go again, you human pantry!" cried Wide with a laugh. "Come on here, Sam, and help with one of these baskets, and we'll all get there in a jiffy."

"What shall I do?" asked the driver. "This ain't no place to leave the team."

"Drive back to the mill and then cut down through the woods, by the straight path, and we'll have dinner ready when you get here."

"All right," said John, the driver, "there's a good row of stalls there and I can put the team up safely."

"Good-by!" called the picnickers. "We'll wait for you!"

"We won't wait very long!" hollered the anxious and hungry Sam Bangs. "We've waited too long already. I'll bet the pickles and the lemons are sour from the heat already, and I know the Saratoga chips are dry as a bone!"

"You villain!" shouted Wide, and he made a pretended attack on the fat boy, who scurried around the wagon and grabbed a big lunch basket for protection.

"All aboard for the spring now!" cried Hal. "Follow on, follow on!"

And the little caravan started down through the shaded pathway, up hill and down dale, past the coziest, shadiest little glens, over little rustic log bridges, and, in short, it was a most delightful trip for the town boys and girls.

"Isn't it pretty down here, Dick?" said Kitty to Wide.

"Yes, Kitty, but it is awfully dry; there hasn't been any rain through the country for nearly two months, and we must be careful and not have any camp-fire, for fear of setting some of the woods ablaze."

This was a wise precaution, and if other folks had been just as thoughtful a great deal of trouble would have been averted for our party of young folks.

Finally they reached the Greenvale River, which ran along in a roundabout course through this part of the country, and Hal, who had often hunted through these heavily wooded districts with country friends, directed the party to a narrow foot-bridge over the flat, shallow, but beautiful, stream.

This bridge was a chain of single logs, flattened above and below and placed along from one big flat rock to another. It was rather a risky job to cross for the girls, but one boy was behind each girl and they were carefully piloted across.

The boys then went back for the lunch baskets and pails and soon the little cavalcade was under way again. They skirted around a great high rocky spur of land which protruded out.

"Isn't that a fine young mountain for this part of the country?" asked Dick.

"Yes, it extends back quite a way right up against the glen where that dandy spring is," said Hal. "That big cliff is all cut up into crevasses, and it is almost impossible to get across it because of the big cracks in the stone."

"Some day we must come out and do a little mountain climbing," said Joe.

"All right, we're game," said the boys.

"Hurry up," said Sam. "I'll begin to eat the basket handle if you don't open up the victuals soon!"

This brought another laugh. Wide said, making a wry face:

"Say Sam, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You have talked so much about eating that you've made even me hungry! And I can't understand it, either, for I have only just finished my breakfast at seven this morning!"

"Sure, shame on you Sam! Why, it's only twelve now!" said Joe teasingly.

But Sam was just about desperate by now, and he began undoing the lunch baskets.

John, the driver, came down soon by a short cut over the hills from the mill.

So all was ready for the feast, and the girls spread the table-cloth on the soft green grass of the little glen, and laid scores of dainties and goodies on the natural table thus made.

"Gee!" said Sam, his mouth watering, "but that is a great line of food!" And he was surely right.

The loving mothers of the young people had all helped in preparing the feast, and Anita's mother helped arrange the delicious spread.

There were great yellow legs of fried chicken; deviled eggs; sandwiches of every known kind and a number which were new to the boys; preserves, and pickles, fruits of many kinds, potato salad, great big chunks of chocolate and caramel cake dear to every American boy's heart, and such wonderful big pieces of pie! Oh, but that was a banquet for the gods!

The boys and girls all were equal to Sam by this time, and even old slow-pokey John, the driver, went at the food ravenously.

"My, but that was the best dinner I've ever had. I wish I could start all over again! I am still hungry, but there's no more space in the storage warehouse!" You can guess who said that!

The crowd sat around sipping lemonade which had been made by Mrs. Duroc's skilled hands from the cool waters of the crystal spring.

On all sides of them but one were the heavy foliaged trees of the forest, and back of them was the high precipitous cliff of the big rocky spur. On the other side of this cliff was the river, but the route to it was nearly a quarter of a mile because of the dense undergrowth of the woods and the peculiar lay of the land.

Unknown to our young friends some careless person had started a fire in the forest not so very far away that very morning, and the blaze had spread with rapidity, because of the strong wind.

Even after they had passed around the rock the flames had swept across the forest and were fast surrounding them.

The height of the trees cut off the sight of the dark pall of smoke which arose from the burning brush, and it was not until the flames were within a few hundred yards of them that Hal suddenly looked up and saw the ominous dark cloud.

"What's that, Dick?" he asked in low tones, dragging Wide aside so as not to alarm the girls at first.

Dick looked up and beheld to his consternation that the woods were burning and the wind bearing right down towards them.

"Girls, we must get away from here," he said quietly, as he turned back to the crowd.

"Why, Dick? What is the matter?" exclaimed Kitty Lester.

Dick pointed to the pall of smoke which was undoubtedly coming nearer to them every instant.

"There is a fire somewhere in the forest around here, and we must get back towards the river."

"Is there any danger?" said Mrs. Duroc, alarmed.

"No, I am sure not," answered Dick, trying to allay the fears of the girls, "but we mustn't take any chances."

"Hurry up, then, girls, and we will start for the bridge, over the Greenvale River, around the other side of the big cliff," said Hal.

Little did they all realize how much progress the flames had made.

They started down the path in a hurry, and had hardly gone a hundred yards before they were alarmed by falling sparks. The flames had cut off their retreat in that direction!

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Wide, taking Kitty's arm to hold her back, "we are blocked off in that direction. Hal, can't we go around the other way?"

"I don't think so, Wide, but we will have to try," answered the young lieutenant of the Washington Company.

"Now, swing around this way, everybody," directed Wide, assuming the leadership as he always did in time of danger.

The picnickers hurried back in the other direction, through the little glen, and tried to get through the underbrush in the opposite way. But the brambles scratched their faces, hands and clothes, and the way was impassable.

"If we only had a hatchet or an axe we could cut a path through!" said Tommy Grogan.

"No, we couldn't! Look there!" cried Dick, and he pointed to the rising flames directly in front of them in that direction also.

"Oh, we're lost!" cried Mrs. Duroc, weeping. "I knew we should never have come on this picnic, for I broke a looking-glass yesterday and that's——"

"Oh, pickles!" grunted Dick. "Those old superstitions have nothing to do with real life! Let's get out of here instead of weeping!"

"You'll see, you'll see! I know we're doomed!" and the poor woman began to pray for aid. The girls, most of them, began to weep bitterly.

But Kitty Lester was a thoroughbred and she never whimpered, although her face was pale with realization of the great danger.

"Can't we climb up the cliff, Dick?" she said. "I'll help get the other girls up if it's possible."

The flames were now rushing towards them from all three sides, and they could hear the terrible crackling of the burning twigs and branches, as they were licked up by the great red, hungry tongues of fire.

The sky above them was overcast and turned to a gruesome gray, while big chunks of burning brands fell down about and even upon them. Tommy and Joe were kept busy brushing the fire-brands and flaked sparks off the dresses of the girls, to keep them from catching fire.

"Let's try the cliff here, Hal!" shouted Dick, and he, Hal and Terry rushed at the great high face of rock, trying in vain to get a foothold on its sloping, slippery sides.

But all in vain, for the cliff was as steep and insurmountable as the Rock of Gibraltar might have been in such a location.

"We're lost—we'll all be burned to death!" shrieked Anita's mother, in hysterics by this time.

Dick Halstead's heart sank within him, for even he could think of no method of escape from their awful fate!

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNEXPECTED RESCUE.

Terry was still struggling away at the rocky cliff and was now trying to clamber up, by holding on to some wild vines which grew up the face of the bluff in one part.

Suddenly his foot slipped, after he had crawled up about ten feet this way, and the Irish lad held his breath, expecting to be precipitated down backwards with a painful bump.

But he did not fall! Instead, his feet sank down in the vines in a different direction and he discovered that he had accidentally stumbled into one of the small crevices in the rock of which Hal had spoken that morning.

"We're caught like rats in a trap," said Wide to himself, as he turned away from the insurmountable cliff, despair in his heart.

Just then a wild whoop was heard from Terry.

"Hey, Wide! Look here, me lad!" he shouted. "Quick, quick, all av yez!"

The unfortunate picnickers rushed over towards him. He was holding himself about eight feet up the side of the sheer precipice, clinging to the vines.

"There's an opening here—come on and crawl in it. Begorra! And it can't take us to anny place worse than this! Hurry!"

It was not necessary for him to urge haste, for the flames were even closer than before.

Terry crawled in and tore away a part of the vine growth, so that the others could indeed see a small, dark-looking opening into the cliff. It was a place that had been torn out of the rock thousands of years before by some convulsion of nature, and Terry could see that it went down and around, getting wider a little further in.

"Oi'll give a hand to the ladies," he shouted. "You are next, Mrs. Duroc!"

Wide hustled the tearful but now hopeful woman to the base of the cliff, and Hal and Tommy locked hands, while she stepped on the improvised platform.

Terry reached out his sinewy arms for her from the little shelf of the crevice.

"Up you go!" cried Young Wide Awake, holding her hand to steady her, and up she did go, the strong young arms of the two Washingtons swinging even her heavy weight lightly up to Terry's reach.

"Ye're safe, mum, now," said Terry; "do plase stop yer waping!" and he pulled her into the opening. "Now, start ahead, plase, and we'll follow!"

Mrs. Duroc did start and walked down the little, narrow, winding passage which curved around through the rock. After a few yards it widened out, and she was able to stand up straight.

Here she waited for the rest of the party, nervously hoping that nothing had befallen them.

But Wide and his cohorts were acting with the rapidity and sureness of machines.

Up! Up! Up! One after another of the girls was bundled up to Terry's waiting arms and hustled down the passage, to the waiting chaperon.

"Now, boys, it's our turn!" cried Wide, and the flames were even nearer.

"You first, Dick!" yelled Sam.

"Not on your life!" cried Dick Halstead. "You're the heaviest of us all, and you go while the biggest bunch is down here to lend a hand!"

This was good logic, and the boys tossed Sam up with ease.

At last all were up but Dick, and the flames were almost licking the back of his neck.

"Hurry, Wide, hurry!" called the boys, alarmed, and they tossed down a long, loose stem of the vine.

Dick clasped this in both hands, and was yanked up to the shelf of the rock and down into the passage just as a great falling tree struck the spot where they had been standing an instant before.

"Hully gee! but that was a narrow escape," said Tommy Grogan. "Don't let's lose any time now, while the rock is here!"

You can be sure that they didn't!

The boys hurried down to the girls and then the party rushed along the winding passage. On through the very heart of the rock it went, and they hesitated not a minute.

In several places they had to take big leaps across other lower openings, for the great cliff seemed honeycombed with passages, now that they were once on the inside, but at last they reached open air, and came to the other side of the cliff.

What was their surprise to find the peaceful flowing waters of the broad, but shallow, Greenvale River!

Far in the distance and down the road on the other side they could see Bush's Mill.

"Gracious! We have found a new short cut," said Wide. "Who would have thought that we had come so near?"

They all rushed down to the water's edge, and the crowd of boys and girls lost no time in washing off the coating of soot and cinders which had covered them in their fire experience.

"Look over the cliff there—you can still see the smoke, Dick!" said Kitty.

"Yes, but the fire has been stopped by the rocks, though, and I don't think it can spread any more. However it acts we are safe, and all we have to do is to walk up the river in the hopes of finding a bridge."

"That was a new kind of fire, wasn't it, Dick, to fight without hose or even axes?" asked Kitty, with a sigh of relief at the escape they had made from the terrible ravages of the flames.

"Yes, but it's all in the life of a fireman," said Dick, "and I think we could have done some tricks there if we had it to do over again. Still, I am satisfied to let bygones be bygones in this case, aren't you, Kitty, dear?"

They kept on along the bank, but no bridge came to view.

"Well, Mrs. Duroc," said Wide to Anita's mother, "there's only one way to get over to that mill, and it's through the river. We boys have our old clothes on, anyway, and don't mind, but it's different with the girls!"

"Gracious, Dick!" said the good lady in despair. "What shall we do?"

"There's one way, if you'll permit it, to let us boys carry the girls and you across."

"Oh, never—that would be scandalous!" Then she thought it over for a minute and laughed, as she saw that it was the only solution.

"Very well, then, Dick," she said with a smile; "but you boys mustn't hold the girls a single wee bit tighter than absolutely necessary, and you must keep your eyes shut all the time!"

Amid little squeals of pretended fright—a way the girls

have of doing under such circumstances—the boys finally lugged them over. And I regret to tell you that they held just as tightly as possible, for they were going to take no chances.

Worse still, every youth had his eyes wide open and not a shapely ankle, nor dainty bit of lace—and there were several on view at various parts of the journey—missed their eagle glances.

"But, then," as Wide said afterward, "we had a right to some toll for the ferrying, and we got soaked to our knees for doing it!"

He didn't tell them that Kitty had paid toll with a sweet but very short kiss just as they were floundering through the water, and the unexpected blessing nearly caused a wreck of the ferry-boat!

At last the whole party was across, Sam Bangs having been the gallant bearer of Mrs. Duroc. They clambered up the bank, and were soon at the mill.

After sitting around and resting from their arduous exertions of the escape from the fire, the party soon decided that it was time to get on their coach again, and the crowd mounted the hay-wagon.

They returned another way, and, as a surprise to the crowd, Dick directed John to drive up to the grounds of the asylum at which they had so gallantly fought the flames some time previously.

The old physician came down to meet them, and they were delighted when he said:

"Hello, young folks! I am glad to see you. I have a little luncheon prepared down in the orchard of the institution, and you are all invited. It is not visiting-day here, or we could have you go through the grounds. But Young Wide Awake told me you were going past here to-day, and I suggested this as a little surprise."

Well, you can imagine the fun the young folks had in the great green orchard where a delicious lunch had been spread for them, and they had cultivated fresh appetites after all their adventures and the ride on the wagon.

When this was finished they bundled on to the wagon and started for home.

"This has been a most adventurous day, Dick," said Anita's mother, "but we owe a great deal more to you boys than the good times—we owe our lives and safety, too."

"Not at all, Mrs. Duroc," said Wide modestly; "our Shamrock champion is the hero of the occasion, and the rest of us don't count."

"Aw, g'wan! Now, quit yure tasing!" said Terry, blushing to the roots of his red hair, clear through the freckles.

So ended the great hay-wagon party of the Washingtons, but they had more to find out about the occurrences of that day.

CHAPTER V.

A COWARDLY PIECE OF MISCHIEF.

When the boys went down to the engine-house to look over things Sunday morning, the day after their picnic, what was their consternation to behold everything topsy-turvy!

"Big jumping Jehoshaphat!" cried Young Wide Awake as he looked about him on a scene of disturbance.

Hose was pulled out, slashed and cut in big gashes. The ladders were sawed through and rungs broken.

"Look at those chairs!" cried Hal, pointing to some chairs which were literally broken to pieces. Indeed, everything which could be smashed in a short time had been damaged as much as possible.

There was no doubt in the boys' minds who had been the authors of this cowardly outrage.

"Fred Parsons is up to his old game, I see—striking in the back!" said Dick Halstead, his eyes flashing dangerously.

He hurried to the telephone and called out the number of Fire Chief Pelton.

"Hello, chief! Is that you? Well, I wish you would drop around here as soon as you can. — Yes, this is Dick. — I want you to see our engine-house. — No, it's not on fire—it's worse! I'll show you when you get down."

"Good work, Dick!" cried Hal; "let's try to get those Neptunes ousted from the fire department."

"It's nearly time," said Dick angrily, "and I am going to do the best I can do to fix them for this cowardly trick."

He rang up the central again.

"Give me police headquarters! Hello! Is that you, Callahan? — Well, I'd like to speak to Assistant Chief Connors. — No, we're not in any trouble—we're going to make it hot for some one else this time!"

The chief's voice was heard over the wires.

"Hello, there!" said Dick. "This is Halstead. Say, chief, our place has been broken into and put on the bum. I want to report it to you and see if we can't prosecute some one. It certainly is a fierce job. — What's that? — You'll be down—all right. Thanks. Good-by."

The chief rang off and the boys went about to see what else had been damaged.

"How'd they get in?" said Hal. "That's where the chance of a prosecution lies."

Soon Chief Pelton and the police official were both at the Holmes Street engine-house.

Both of them stormed and railed in their just anger over this outrage.

"Why, this is an insult to the city of Belmont!" declared Pelton as he paced up and down angrily.

"What if there should be a fire in this section? It would mean that the forces were put out of commission for this whole company. That is a criminal offense if we can prove it on any one," said Connors.

"I suspect who it was, all right. I'd bet my last penny against a marble the Neps are the guilty parties!" said Dick Halstead.

"You are right on the track, Dick," said Connors. "I won't deny that, but I daren't mention any names without evidence. If we can prove that certain envious fellows broke in here it will mean a criminal trial and prosecution."

"The only thing to do is to examine everything and then lay low," said Chief Pelton.

Every inch of the fire-house was examined, but no clues were found. Not a thing had been stolen as far as they could see, and this in itself proved that the personal ele-

ment had counted. There was only one clique in Belmont which was at odds with the gallant Washingtons.

"Sure as providence it's those Neptunes!" said Connors; "but the evidence is not here to prove it in a court of law."

"I have a scheme, Connors," said Pelton. "I'll tell it to you and we two can work it out together. Come over here."

The two men entered into serious talk for several minutes, and then stepped back to speak with the Washingtons.

"Boys, it's a good thing that this was discovered so soon. It would have been frightful if there had been a fire before we found this out. Now, Connors and I have a plan, and we'll work it out without telling even you lads. You can just be sure that we are doing our best, and so all go ahead with repairing it as best you can."

"All right, chief," said the young captain of the Washingtons; "it doesn't do any good to cry over spilt milk, and we may have a fire call before long. What shall we do about hose and ladders?"

"Well, luckily, we have a new supply which just came into Belmont from New York. They were going to be distributed to the Torrents first because they were the oldest fire company here. But in a case like this I will use my discretion and send them directly to you."

"Good, chief, these boys merit the best stuff you have. I'll go on up to headquarters and work up some more details of our plan. Now, boys, don't say a word to any one about this mean work, and we will spring a surprise on some of your young friends."

The two officials departed, chatting over their ideas, and the boys buckled down to work.

"I know it's Sunday, boys, but this work is a matter of life and death. We are just like doctors to sick people—we perform operations and dose up burning buildings, and so we must prepare for duty at any time."

This met with the approval of the Washingtons, and they unselfishly devoted their holiday to work of needed kinds, and by afternoon the machines were all in order.

The chief had sent down a large team-load of new hose, nozzles, and some new ladders, which you may well guess were welcome to the Washington fire-laddies.

"Say, boys, this gives us the best equipment in Belmont, ahead of our turn. The Neptunes spited only themselves this time," said Dick.

It was well indeed for Belmont that the Washingtons were so well and speedily equipped again, for that evening the fire-alarms wildly rang out about eleven o'clock, and the boys raced to their house.

It was a general alarm, and the boys knew that serious work was in store for them from the ominous red glow which spread over the sky at the eastern side of the town.

"Quick, boys!" yelled Dick, "we must beat the Neptunes to the blaze, and show them that their tricks can't delay us a second!"

The boys grabbed hold of the ropes with a will and down the dark but familiar streets they dashed at a rattling good clip.

Cling! clang! rang the bells of the fire-machines and at that time of night they had no one to block the streets and retard them.

"Bow-wow!" How the dogs barked as they passed darkened houses, and on they clattered at break-neck speed, for

the Washingtons were racers when their blood was up, and they did not wait for others to reach the goal first.

"Now, we are almost there!" called Wide, who was tugging away at the rope of the first machine, for he was anxious to increase the speed. "Great smoke! Hal, it's the big grain warehouse on First Street!"

The flames had evidently been smoldering long, for they had gained great headway now and were throwing a red pall over all the midnight skies.

"Down this street to the plugs," called Wide, who knew the ground perfectly, and the boys whirled around the corner.

Close behind them were the puffing Neptunes, whose engine-house was nearer the scene of the fire. But the Washingtons had fairly beaten.

The Neptunes were a close second, however, and both the companies made a rush for the fire-plugs.

The Washingtons, with Hal Norton leading the hose squad, reached the plugs first and were just starting to screw on the jointings when Fred Parsons rushed up.

"This is our plug here, you!" he cried. "You fellows belong down at the next set."

"Do we?" asked Hal with chilling politeness. "Well, Mr. Smarty, you get another guess, so just run along and hunt up your own plugs; this one is all ready."

"You can't come lording it over me, you low-down hound!" snorted Fred as he tried to reach the end of the Washingtons' hose to uncouple it. This was an absolute disobedience of all the department rules, and Hal was astonished.

"I'll show you whether you can bluff me out," continued Fred, mistaking the young lieutenant's silence for submission. He thought it was time for him to play the conqueror for a change, and so he started out boldly.

"Not with your present powers, you won't," snorted Hal Norton, and before Fred realized it he was falling over backwards into the gutter with his right ear ringing from a flat-hand blow from Hal's sturdy left.

He leaped to his feet and rushed towards the Washington.

Gerald Keating rushed in between the two. He cautioned Fred and shoved him back.

"Steady, Fred, steady! Remember, you can be discharged for fighting or interfering with the fire work during a big blaze. So, be careful!"

Hal stood his ground glaring at the captain of the Neptunes. Pelton had quietly walked up on the side, but neither boy noticed him.

"All right there with the juice!" yelled Hal to the Washingtons who were dragging the tubing down toward the entrance of the blazing warehouse.

"You low-down sneak!" yelled Parsons furiously. "I'll——"

"No, you won't!" quickly interrupted Hal. "If you give any more interference I'll break your head with this hose-wrench. I have some idea of my duty at a fire, and if you interfere with it I'll put you where you won't worry about hose, plugs or anything else!"

The chief rushed up and looked at Parsons sharply.

"What's this, young man? Fighting again, and on duty?" he asked curtly.

"No, sir, that fellow is trying to keep the Neptunes

from getting to the work with the hose. They only get the water on first by tricks."

"Well, if you attended to your work and let the other company do theirs in peace there'd be a great deal less trouble here. Any more monkey business and I'll hand in a report about you and your company to the town council. I've got it sealed in my safe now—so you just remember that!"

Fred turned away snarling.

"It's a dangerous fire, Hal, and so you'd better get right into the game with the boys, as Wide was yelling for you."

The young lieutenant made a rush for the entrance and collided with Sam Bangs, who was dragging a hose-line into the darkened building.

"Gosh, Sam! I nearly broke my nose against your fat shoulder."

"I'm sorry, Hal, but this is a heavy job, and I need help."

So Hal joined in the tug of war with the hose and soon they had the line well inside the warehouse.

It was quite dark inside, with thick, heavy, suffocating smoke from the burning grain, but the boys used lanterns as best they could.

"It's a long way into that passage where the fire is," said Wide.

"Yis, indade. Shure, and Oi think we're lost," answered Terry, who was close behind him, as the two advanced ahead of the Washingtons to find the lay of the land.

The warehouse was certainly an enormous structure, and the long corridor back of the great grain-rooms wound around in a bewildering way.

Even Wide's skillful knowledge of fighting fire in the dark was almost at a loss to keep track of the windings and twists of the passageway.

But suddenly Wide exclaimed to his friend:

"Look there, Terry—the first real flame we've seen!" He pointed to a little burst of flame at a dark end of the passage before them.

"Faith, and 'tis a peculiar-looking flame! Let's have a close look."

"All right," said Wide, and the two ran down the passage to the burning part.

It was a little hole which had burned its way through from the other side of the wall, where evidently the real conflagration was taking place.

"Begorra, but this is a fierce smoke," said the Irish lad, coughing and wrapping a moistened handkerchief around his neck and mouth.

"Good idea," said Dick Halstead, and the two boys advanced toward the burning wall to learn the best way of fighting the flame. Far back of them in the corridor they could hear the calls of the Washingtons who were bringing the lengths of hose that way.

"This will be a hot test of our new hose and ladders, Terry," said Wide through his handkerchief.

"Yis—and a worrse wan fer oursilves!" The Irish lad made a slash at the woodwork of the passage where the flames were playing, and—Brrr!

A dozen yards of the wall caved in, showering them with sparks. This showed that the wall was practically burned through and just ready to fall.

"Hurry up, Washingtons!" screeched Wide through his

fire-trumpet, and the answering voices echoed down the corridors.

Suddenly, from the opening which they had chopped, and which was falling down, a long blast of flame shot at them. It was directly from the great bin of burning grain which they had broken into, and the passageway acted as the flue of a long chimney.

"Gee! Look out, Terry!" cried Young Wide Awake, seeing the danger which threatened. Terry had his back turned and was looking for another point of attack.

He did not notice the flaming arm that reached for him, and Wide's cry called him to his sense of danger.

Crackle! How the wood of the dry warehouse walls did burn, and the suffocating fumes of smoke rolled back over them from the opened bin!

Another great mass of flame, larger than the first, swept towards them, and the two boys stumbled backwards in their endeavor to get out of its way.

Flat on the floor they fell, while the great sheet of fire shot out right over them, almost blistering their faces.

"Begorra! But this is too close quarters for poor Terry!" groaned the Irish lad, and the two boys started to crawl back from the furnace-like wall on all-fours.

CHAPTER VI.

TERRY IN A TERRIBLE PLIGHT.

Slowly, almost inch by inch, the boys crept back to safety, for the flames were several feet above them and the draught carried most of the terrible heat at that higher level.

"Oh, me! But that was a foine young taste av purgatory, Wide," said the brave little Irish lad, never losing for a minute his shamrock wit. "Oi think Oi'll reform right now!"

Wide laughed back again, but he was too serious over the terrible problem before them to think about jesting.

"We must get the water into that bin, Terry," said he. "Those boys ought to hurry with the water!"

As he spoke the first hose-line was dragged up to where he stood and Hal was ready for the stream.

"Let her go, Hal," cried the young captain, "right into that furnace entrance there where we were nearly caught!"

"All right, Wide," answered the young lieutenant, and turned on the water from the nozzle control.

Sssssshhh! How the stream did hiss and splutter as the steam rolled up from the flames!

"Seems as if the fire only ate up more water and grew on it," said Tommy, who was helping Hal at the nozzle.

"Yes, it does," answered Hal. "Wide, can't you hurry that hose-line up to us so we can get another stream playing on this place? If we once eat a black hole into that red we'll have a good start to win."

"You're right, Hal," cried Wide, and he turned and raced down the dark passageway to bring another nozzle crew into the game there. He lost his way once in the dark, but with a fireman's cunning got in the direction of the hose and felt his way out to the door.

"Boys, boys," cried the young captain, "we must have another hose at work inside!"

"All right, Wide!" yelled Harry Phelps and Joe Darrell, and they at once began to drag the second hose-line into the hallway.

"I'll help, for it's a fierce job," said Wide, "and it's hard to follow the passage."

His previously gained knowledge helped them. Over bumps and fallen timbers they advanced, and after a hard struggle they had the second line in place.

They arrived none too soon, for the boys were having a hot tussle against the red demon. Outside the lads at the machine pumped away vigorously under the direction of Sam Bangs, who had persuaded a number of the crowd of spectators to lend a hand.

"Those are mighty long hose-lines," said the fat fellow, "and we need all the force we can get."

So there was a good, lively pressure on the stream of the two nozzles, which was lucky for the boys inside.

"Now, let's clear away the flames from that wall," said Wide.

This was done, and soon the black began spreading in a satisfactory way, which showed that they were beating the flames in this part of the building.

All this time the Neptunes and Torrents and even a bucket brigade were working like beavers on the other side of the warehouse.

"Now, into the breach!" yelled the young captain of the brave Washingtons, and the boys surged towards the opening in the wall.

Hiss! They poured two streams of the cooling liquid into the seething flames of burning grain, and soon they beheld to their satisfaction that this blaze was disappearing.

"Keep at it, boys, now," directed Wide, "while Terry and I reconnoiter around the warehouse and try to get a line on the other part of the fire."

Hal took command, and waved his hand at Wide.

"I'll get this all out, then follow you up, Dick," he called, and the young captain knew that good work was certain under his brave lieutenant.

"Which way are ye going, Wide?" asked the Irish lad.

"Let's get around this passageway and up the stairs we saw before. There must be some outlet there into the other great bin, which the superintendent said outside was burning, too."

"All right, Oi'm wid ye."

They felt their way along with one lantern between them, much quicker than it takes to tell it, you may be sure, for the boys were experts at finding their way in strange houses, so much experience had they gained in their fire-fighting.

"Now, up these stairs, Terry," said the young fire captain.

Up they mounted and hastened along.

"That bin ought to be on the other side of the passage from this, I think. Let's look."

They finally found a door and rattled it. It was heavily locked. Terry held his head to the woodwork of the door and listened.

"There's no great foire in there," he said; "Oi hear no crackling."

"Let's find out where it goes to, anyway," said Dick. "It may be the strategic point of the whole warehouse fire."

He swung his axe around and set the lantern on the floor.

Biff! biff! The sharp axe flashed through the air and splintered the door.

"That's a stout door," said the captain, and Terry took a hand with his weapon.

They kept hammering away at the tough oaken wood until finally the door swung on its hinges.

"Oi wonder where it goes to, begorra?" said Terry, and he felt his way to the door and stepped in.

Just as he did so Dick reached for the lantern, and picking it up he started to follow Terry.

He turned to enter the door where his friend had disappeared, when what was his astonishment to behold that there was no floor before him. A black, yawning space spread out before and under him!

Terry was nowhere to be seen!

Dick almost stepped off the threshold of the doorway into the yawning abyss, as it seemed to him there in the dark, but caught himself just in time.

"Terry! Terry! Where are you?" he screeched.

"Down here!" came a faint voice from the inky depths, and Wide was startled even more.

"Where? What's the matter?" yelled the young captain to his friend.

"Oi've fallen off the blooming landing, begorra!" came the faint voice.

"Did you hurt yourself, Terry?" yelled Wide, trying in vain to hold the lantern so he could see the whereabouts of his friend.

"No, but Oi'm nearly choked with this grain. Oi fell roight into the blamed bin—about a twenty-foot drop, for there ain't much grain in it now."

Wide looked around him for a rope to get his friend up with, but nothing of the sort was within reach.

"Get me out av this place, quick, Wide! Oi'm nearly choked wid the dust!" said the Irish lad, coughing desperately and proving his statement.

"What can I do?" thought Wide in despair. He glanced down into the darkness of the bin.

"Great Scott!" he gasped in real terror this time for Terry's safety.

There, in a corner of the bin, was beginning to glow a red little tongue of flame, showing that the fire had entered the grain-room here!

In a minute or so his friend would be doomed, for the flames began leaping up even now!

CHAPTER VII.

A DOUBLE-EDGED BATTLE IN THE DARK.

Wide turned away and looked at the distance to the stairs.

"Just a second, now, Terry, and I'll be with you—wait, and you'll be all right!" he called. Then he turned on his heel and rushed downstairs and out into the open air towards the machine.

A coil of rope was hanging in its place for just such emergencies.

"Hey, Sam and Ted! Follow me up at once—get some one else on the machine!"

Wide turned and ran for the entrance of the hallway. Up

the stairs inside the warehouse corridor he ran, knowing the way better now and desperation lending sureness to his sense of direction.

The two Washington lads followed him, knowing that some desperate need would have to bring them away from the machine at such a moment and in such speed.

"Gee! But this is a dark hole," muttered Sam, cracking his shins against the stairs as he stumbled.

"Come on, quick, to save Terry's life!" screeched Wide, hurrying ahead of them.

They now understood and redoubled their speed.

Soon Wide reached the entrance to the bin. The second floor entrance had been one of the loading places, when the chutes were out of order, which accounted for the height from the floor to the bin.

As he looked down his heart sank! The flames were roaring at one end of the big bin, and Terry was nowhere to be seen, for the smoke was dense and the red light blinding.

"Where are you, Terry?" yelled the young captain through his trumpet.

But no reply came!

"He must be overcome with smoke and gases, and I'll go down after him," yelled Young Wide Awake.

Quick as thought he wrapped the end of the rope around the swinging-door, giving the short end to sturdy Sam and Ted, who were now standing by him.

"When I pull the rope three jerks, pull up," said Wide.

The boys knew him too well to try to dissuade him from his dangerous effort, and the flames increased in fury down there in the bin. One end was clear, however, that just below the door, and Wide was sure that here was where Terry Rourke had fallen and was to be found now.

Down the rope he slid with the dexterity of a fireman or a sailor.

Holding fast to the rope and coughing in the fearful smoke and fumes he fumbled around for his friend.

"Where can he be?" he said to himself despairingly as he felt around, feeling his own senses grow weaker and weaker as suffocation stole upon him.

"At last!" thought Wide, as in a blind way he staggered, in the knee-deep softness of the grain, over Terry's unconscious form.

The brave young captain grabbed hold of the inert body of his friend and yanked the rope three times, the concerted signal.

He had twisted the rope around his own waist a couple of times before, and with the blind tenacity of the fighting bulldog Wide held on to the body of his friend and maintained the hold on his precious rope.

"Gee! They're both unconscious!" cried Sam, as the two forms were pulled up over the threshold of the door landing, into the flickering light of the lantern.

"Quick! Not a minute to lose!" cried he to his companion, and they dragged the two boys as best they could, half carrying, half pulling them down the stairs into the open air.

As they drew away from the door of the bin a gust of flame swept up towards them and they ducked down the stairs just in time.

When they reached the ground Chief Pelton came rushing up.

"What's the matter here? My gracious! If it isn't Dick Halstead. Quick, there, with some water! These two boys are nearly suffocated!"

The two lads were worked over for several minutes before they returned to consciousness.

Meanwhile the chief called the rest of the Washingtons out of the burning warehouse.

"That wing of the building is a death-trap, and I won't risk any more of your lives in there! So just work around the outside here and keep the rest of the building from catching, boys," he ordered.

So the Washingtons spread around and directed their hose on the walls of the next building, to prevent the spread of the flames.

Dick came to his senses the first, and he sat up weakly.

"Where's Terry?" he asked at once, remembering his terrible task.

"Right here, safe and sound," answered Pelton, patting Dick on the shoulder. "That was a wonderful rescue you made, from what Sam tells me, Dick."

"Oh, not at all; but is Terry still unconscious?" He saw a doctor working busily over the Irish lad.

"He's coming back now," replied the physician, and Terry opened his eyes weakly and coughed. "Where am Oi?" he asked.

"Not a word, boy," said the physician. "You must rest yourself for a few minutes before you try to speak. You are safe now, and all is well."

Terry felt too weak to argue the fact, and he breathed the delicious open air with unconcealed delight. It was quite a change from the terrible death-trap in the grain-bin.

He smiled at Dick, and the latter struggled to his feet.

"I must get back with the boys!" said the young hero, and he staggered over towards the company.

He was greeted with a cheer by the boys when he returned to their ranks, and their cry seemed to put new energy into him.

Just then the superintendent of the warehouse came rushing up to the boys wringing his hands.

"Great guns! What's wrong now?" cried Wide, feeling that some new catastrophe had happened from the man's grief-stricken face.

"Oh, boys!" he cried, "my daughter is caught in the cave-in over in the wing of the warehouse where we have our living quarters. Can't you try to save her?"

"You bet we can!" yelled Wide. "Come on, boys, after me!"

They turned and followed the frantic superintendent as he rushed back to another wing of the big structure. Here he had five rooms on the ground floor of the building, where he lived with his daughter, looking after the big structure.

"The girl's bedroom was right in there," said he, pointing, "and that all has fallen in. I heard her scream, and now I can't get in because it is a solid mass of flame between us and there!"

"My stars! That is bad!" said Wide to himself.

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried the unhappy father. "I'll go in myself!"

He started rushing towards the flames with an insane idea that he could fight his way through. Of course it meant suicide.

"Hold him back!" cried Hal.

The boys caught the wretched man and held him still.

"We will save her if human skill can do it!" cried Wide, "so you just give us a hand on the machine."

They raced over for one of the machines, and in an incredibly short time the hose was being played on the flames between them and the wrecked bedchamber.

"Direct it there!" shouted Wide, and soon the fire had died down enough for them to leap past with their fire-axes and grenades.

Hal, Tommy, and Dick were the three in advance, and the young captain waved the other Washingtons back.

"You boys be ready to help when I holler!" he shouted, and he disappeared behind a smoking wall.

"Where was the bedroom?" asked Hal.

"Right there!" said Wide, pointing to the smoking ruins, "and there in the floor is the place where it caved in!"

No sign of a girl was in sight, and the boys felt that they had come too late.

"I wonder if she could have run into another room? Hello! Hello!" shouted Young Wide Awake through his trumpet.

A faint "Hello!" answered his call.

"Where are you?" he shouted again.

This time they were sure of it—it was a girl's voice!

"She's down in the cellar," said Hal, judging of the direction of the sound.

They cautiously advanced to the edge of the opening into the cellar and leaned over.

"Here I am! Down here!" came a frightened girl's voice. "Oh, please get me out, can't you?"

"How did you get there?" yelled Dick. "How can we get there?"

"I was on my bed," answered the girl, "and when it fell through the sunken floor it let me down easy. Now the bricks are falling in and I am in a corner under the floor. Oh, please, please, get me out—it's starting to burn down in the other end!"

"Is there a cellar stairway?" asked Wide.

"Yes, down the other end of the cellar," answered the girl.

"Come on, then, boys; we will drop down here and come up the stairs with the girl."

Over the rough, ragged edge of the floor Dick scrambled and dropped down to the cellar below.

"Come on, Hal and Tommy!" he called, and his two friends followed him gallantly.

They floundered around a pile of rough bricks and floor timbers, but the voice of the young girl directed them to her corner of safety where she had taken shelter beneath the jutting floor above.

They had arrived very opportunely, for, sure enough, the walls of the cellar were blazing and threatened a dangerous condition in a few moments.

"Which is the way for the cellar stairway?" asked Wide hurriedly, and the girl pointed to the right.

"Oh! I can't walk over this glass and brick stuff in my bare feet!" she screamed with pain, for she was only in a night-dress, with her soft, long curls streaming down loosely in the back.

The gallant and nowise loth young captain of the Washingtons lost no time in grasping the situation. He also

grasped the handsome girl, too, in his strong arms, and without another word they started down toward the cellar stairway.

As they left the section of the cellar in which they had been a thundering noise was heard. Dick whirled around, and looked behind him at a terrifying sight, while the frightened girl shrieked and clung the closer to her brave young rescuer.

The whole wall had caved in back of them—finishing the work which was begun before. Their escape and rescue were equally cut off from the rear!

"We'll have to find those stairs now," said Dick. It was a hard job, for by now every spot of light had been cut off by the falling wall, and they were in inky darkness.

"Which way do you think it is now, young lady?" asked Dick of his trembling little passenger. She was a girl of about seventeen, and Dick could see that the poor girl was shivering with cold, for her costume was only one thin piece.

"We'll soon be out of it," he said to comfort her. "Can't you remember which direction it ought to be in?" The girl pointed straight ahead, even though it was too dark for him to see her hand—a little thing which she forgot.

"Right in front of us, I think!" she said tearfully. "Oh, I'm so frightened!"

"There, there, don't worry, it'll be all right!" said Young Wide Awake stoutly, aloud. But to himself he thought: "This is a pretty pickle, and I am not so sure about it!"

"I'll go down one side and you down the other, Tommy," said Hal, "while Dick will advance slowly in the middle. That way we can cover all possible space."

Suddenly Dick felt a splashing on his face.

It came from above. Then he heard the swish of a nozzle, and knew that the hose were playing on the part of the house above their cellar prison.

"We won't get burned out," he thought thankfully. Then he stopped, for he felt the water around his ankles.

"Great Scott!" said Dick to himself. "There's more than fire-hose turning water in here. It must be a bursted main somewhere."

His guess was right, and a great volume of water was streaming into the other end of the cellar room from a crack in the wall.

"Have you found any stairs yet, Dick?" asked Tommy, groping uncomfortably and unsuccessfully in the dark.

"No, I haven't. All I've struck is a young river that's rising mighty fast around my ankles."

"Neither have I," groaned Hal, as he struck his head a painful bump against a loose timber.

"Oh, is this cellar flooding?" cried the girl, as she felt the water splash against her bare ankles. "Oh, we'll be drowned if we escape the fire!" and she burst into renewed tears.

"I guess I don't blame the poor girl," thought Wide, but he valiantly ploughed ahead through the deepening water in the cellar. They found an entrance into another basement room.

"This is the room, I think," said the young girl, as they felt their way past the wall projection. "There are no stairs in here, I'm sure."

The water was rushing in now more than ever, and it was a fearful feeling to hear the splashing of the liquid from the

broken main, to see nothing but inky, horrible blackness, and to stumble along over bricks and jagged stones.

The girl was getting pretty heavy by this time for Young Wide Awake, who had already been pretty well tired out that evening. But he grimly held on and struggled forward.

"The water's waist-deep!" called Tommy, a Job's comforter.

"Don't you suppose I feel it?" snapped Hal, losing patience.

Just then he felt a little better, for he stumbled against some woodwork which was unmistakably the base of some stairs.

"Hurrah!" he shouted. "We have hit the stairs!"

"Oh, we're saved!" cried the girl joyously, as Wide struggled towards the sound of Hal's voice in the deepening water.

But she was wrong, for the boy clambered up to the top of the ladder-like steps only to find a heavy bulkhead trap-door tightly closed above them.

"Jehoshaphat!" cried Hal. "The cellar door is locked! We can't get through!"

"Have you an axe, Tommy?" asked Hal; "or you, Wide?"

"Not a one," answered the discouraged lads, for it seemed as if their plucky efforts were to end in failure and—death!

Higher and higher mounted the water, and their last chance seemed gone!

Holding the girl with one arm, Wide waded through the water fast flooding the cellar. The boys on the ladder were striving with desperate energy to force up the trap-door, but it stoutly resisted their efforts!

"Quick, Hal; you and Tommy get your backs together and shove at the same time under the trap-door!" directed Wide as he reached the bottom of the stairs.

But it was of no avail. The heavy trap-door resisted every effort. Their friends outside evidently were ignorant of their plight, and the four young people were trapped like rats in a sinking ship!

The water mounted up higher and higher, and the four crouched on the steps in the best positions they could gain, striving to keep their heads above water.

Suddenly a new sound was heard.

"Listen to that!" said Wide, with hope springing up in his heart.

"What?" asked Tommy, doubting, but listening.

There were quick steps on the floor above them. Then they passed and all was still.

"Oh, they have passed it by!" cried the poor young girl.

"There they come again!" said Hal hopefully, as the sound was repeated just a few inches above their heads.

This time it sounded as if there were a number of feet walking and running around.

"There are voices," said the girl, and they could hear the sound of quick, loud talk, but could not distinguish the words.

Then of a sudden the sound of quick, well-directed axe-blows was heard on the trap-door above them.

But the water had mounted up, and up, and up, until now their mouths were covered and they were stretching to keep their nostrils above!

CHAPTER VIII.

SAVED IN THE NICK OF TIME.

Chop! chop! The axe-blows rang out above their heads.

"They may decapitate us if they don't let us drown," thought Dick to himself, but, luckily for them, the hinges were on one side of the door out of their way, and the padlock on the other.

Rip! and the door was torn loose just in the nick of time, for the water was up to their nostrils by now!

It was Chief Pelton and the superintendent, while the Washingtons crowded around the trap-door.

With a gasping gurgle Dick pulled himself together and shoved the poor young girl up to the kind, strong arms reached for her, and then his own arms were yanked lustily and he was dragged up.

Tommy and Hal were rescued with equal speed, and you can imagine the war-whoops that went up from the delighted fire-laddies when their heroic young captain, dripping though he was, was returned to them by such a timely act.

"Hurray! Hurray for Dick Halstead!" cried Sam Bangs, and the fire-boys crowded around and cheered lustily. The members of the Torrent Company, the older organization, came rushing up, and when they heard of the brave deed of the Washington boys they cheered to the echo.

Needless to say, however, the Neptunes were not generous enough to cheer for Dick or his friends, although George Anderson, the best of their crowd, came running over to congratulate Wide.

"We must get out of here at once," said the chief, "for this place is apt to cave in at any moment."

They did so, and the precaution was a wise one, for the walls of the doomed structure soon collapsed and it was practically a total loss despite the brave work of the firemen.

"Well, we kept it from spreading, which was a lot under the circumstances," said Wide to Chief Pelton.

"Yes, and you did two of the bravest rescues that I've ever seen in all my broad experience," said the chief, smiling. "It was a great night for the Washingtons, anyway, Dick."

Just then the signal "all out" was given, and the chief turned to give his final orders. The flames had gutted the warehouse practically, and what had not been burned had been flooded out with water, and of course the grain was ruined.

"Well, our building is almost a total loss," said the superintendent; "but, fortunately, we had little grain in, because this is the dull time of the year. And we have the

building fully insured, also the grain, in Parsons' company, so I'm not worrying."

"Ah, that will be a blow for old man Parsons," thought Dick. "We'll see some short skate work from him now, I'm sure."

"Where is the young lady?" asked Dick, turning to the superintendent.

"Thank you, she has been taken into a neighbor's house, and is being given hot broth. I can never thank you enough for your brave rescue, nor from keeping me from plunging to my death in that fire. All my own things are burned up, but the life of my little girl is of more value than anything else in the world, as you can well guess. I hope I can repay you some day," said the grateful man.

But Wide did not like the gratitude part, and he shook hands and modestly got away.

Pelton followed him and said, putting a fatherly hand on the youth's shoulder:

"Dick, I'm going to let the other boys take the machines home, and you are to get into my rig and drive right home with me this instant. Terry has been sent home, and you've overdone yourself by those two prodigious performances. So come right along with me."

"Oh, no, I can't," said Wide. But as he spoke he staggered and grew dizzy. Then he realized that he was indeed worn out, and he thought it wise to obey the chief's commands.

As they were driving towards Wide's house the chief seemed thoughtful.

"Did you notice a number of strange faces among those Neptune boys?" he suddenly asked the Washington.

"No, I didn't. I was too busy keeping down my end of the job," said Wide. "But I did hear that they have a number of new members."

"Is that so?" asked the chief with interest. "When did they bring in some new ones without notifying headquarters, I wonder?" continued Pelton.

"That's all I know," said Wide, too tired to talk much more; "they got a couple of new fellows from the other side of town—the Hollow Gang, I hear, and I don't think that is very good stuff to recruit from."

"I should say not," answered the chief. "I'll look into this."

Without more conversation, for he saw that Young Wide Awake was almost done up by his night's work, they drove on through the dark streets.

Soon Wide was home, and he climbed out stiffly, not forgetting his usual courtesy, however, despite his aching bones.

"Good-night, chief," he said. "Thanks for the lift."

He staggered from exhaustion and would have fallen off the steps if the official had not nimbly leaped to aid him.

"That boy is in a bad way, after over-doing himself to-night," said the chief to Wide's anxious mother. "You'd better trundle him into bed and keep him there for about twelve hours."

The good woman followed Pelton's advice, and a good long rest did wonders for the brave but worn-out young captain.

"Is Wide in?" asked Terry Rourke late the next afternoon, while the young captain was still resting up.

"Yes, I am in," called Dick downstairs on hearing Terry's voice; "come on up. I'm so lazy that I'm still lying around the house."

Dick had not dressed yet, and so Terry ran up to superintend that important series of maneuvers.

"How do you feel, Terry? You mustn't inhale the smoke next time!" said Wide, laughing.

"Oi feel foine," replied the Irish lad gaily, "and Oi hope your stunts didn't do you up completely."

"No, they tried to but failed. I was about all in last night, and wrenched my back and shoulder muscles pretty badly. I couldn't win any boat race just to-day, with such shoulders as I have. But I'll be all right soon."

"We certainly won all the credit there was to win, didn't we, bedad? Those Neptunes were sore as Adam's off-ox, and they couldn't understand about us havin' such a foine bit av hose and ladders. We fooled them!"

"Yes, Terry, they must have been surprised. Did you notice that they have several new fellows in the Neptune Company? I wonder what it means?" asked Wide.

"It joost means thot they are for doing us up. They can't lick us at fires nor at fist-fights wid their prisint numbers, and so their numbers are being puffed out. But it'll take far more than they can get to beat the Washingtons. Ain't Oi right?"

"I hope you are," said Wide, "but I don't believe in being too sure."

He was almost dressed by this time, and was adjusting a necktie with great care and precision.

"Faith, and you're a regular dude!" said Terry with a snort. "Oi guess you're going to see some wan this afternoon, and Oi guess again thot Oi know who 'tis!"

"You're a very keen guesser," said Dick with a laugh, "and you can walk up part way to the Lesters' and drop in and see Faith Vane!"

"Bedad, Wide, you're no spalpeen at guessing yoursilf!"

The two started up the street and were enjoying their talk splendidly when four figures came down the street and crossed over to meet them.

"Why, that's Parsons and two of the new fellows, with Keating," said Dick in a low tone to Terry.

"Some diviltry, Oi know," said Terry in response.

But the two boys paid not the slightest heed to the ap-

proaching quartette, and walked right along, engaged in their own talk and matters.

As they reached the four, Fred Parsons stepped directly in front of them.

"Just the fellows I'm looking for," said he in an insolent tone. "I'm glad I had the pleasure of meeting you, for you generally dodge me!"

Dick Halstead looked up at him and stared with equal insolence.

"You're butting in on conversation that doesn't concern you, Parsons; you'd better run along and play!"

The Neptune captain leered, and said to his fellows:

"This is the smart boy who tried to queer me last night with the chief at the fire. My father is going to make it hot for him, all right, because if he hadn't blocked off our hose-lines we could have had the water on at least ten minutes sooner and put out the flames."

"What do you mean, you false sneak?" cried Wide, his anger rising.

"You'll find out, smartie, that the insurance company will make it pretty choice running for you because of that fire. I have witnesses to prove that you blocked me off, and that I was struck by one of your company while in the line of my duty. The biggest fire insurance company of the country is on your trail, all right, and you'll get all that's coming to you and a little bit more!"

"Is that so?" asked Dick. "Very well, you'll get what's coming to you, and your father will get his, too, if I can place any confidence in what the reputable business men of Belmont say. Just because your father has accumulated money—some strange way or other—is no sign that he can play fast and loose with this town. As for you, there are several little things that will hit you good and hard before long. And here's one of them, if you get any fresher with me, Fred Parsons!"

Dick shook a hard, sinewy fist in the face of the Neptune, and he noticed that the four fellows closed around Terry and himself.

"You can't bluff us!" cried one of the strange fellows, and Dick turned to look at him. He was about twenty-two years of age, older than the average run of the volunteer fire-boys, and his face showed his toughness and dissipation.

His hat was pulled down over his eyes, and he was the very picture of one of the so-called Bowery toughs of New York.

"Who's your friend, Parsons?" asked Dick with a grin which angered the Neptune still more.

"He is one of our new members, and better than the whole bunch of you rotten Washingtons!" snorted Fred angrily.

Dick looked the mean-looking strange youth up and down

with great care, and then he turned to Terry, pretending to be very sorrowful.

"Say, Terry, old boy, I think it's too bad about the Neptunes, don't you? The poor fellows, I am really sorry for them!"

"Which way, Wide? There are so many things to pity them for!" answered the Irish boy, helping the roast along.

"Well, Terry," said Dick, looking pityingly at the two strange fellows and then at Parsons and his lieutenant, "they certainly get stung—they've only got one gentleman in the old members, George Anderson, and now they get spoiled meat in their canned goods which they have just bought! They're stung all around!"

"Wot's dat, you fresh mug?" shouted the new fellow angrily, advancing with a threatening attitude towards Dick. "I've heard about youse, and I guess you don't try any of your fresh talk wid me or me pal!"

Dick looked at him boldly.

"Well, fellow, you may have heard something, but you haven't heard all about the Washingtons or you would not be so aggressive. The older fellows have gotten theirs several times, and you are due for your initiation if you start any of their games with us!"

The tough fellow rushed Dick without another word and aimed a stinging uppercut at our hero's face.

But Dick was on his guard for just such an attack, and ducked his head and shoulders skillfully, and rammed the fellow a terrific blow under the right armpit.

The assailant started back, and it was evident that he had received unexpected punishment.

"Now, you just run along about your business," said Wide. "Get as gay as you want to in your own part of town, but act decently over here, or you won't stay long."

As he spoke the other strange member of the Neptunes rushed at the young captain from the other side, trying to revenge the blow against his partner.

Biff! He received an uppercut along the side of the face that he did not expect, for Terry Rourke was standing back of Wide, and had forestalled the attack.

"You're in the wrong berth, bedad!" said Terry, and he followed up the blow with an open-handed slap which brought the red to the fellow's dirty cheek.

This was the signal for a mix-up between the two couples, for Fred Parsons and Keating, his shadow, stood by watching the mill, confident that their imported fighters could do the work alone, and, besides, they remembered certain lickings of the past.

Bang! slam! The strange fellow attacking Dick was not entirely at bay, and he landed a vicious neck blow over Wide's guard that hurt a lot.

Dick recoiled and struck back valiantly.

Biff! He landed a good one on the nose of the stranger

and drew the crimson, which is the flag of real scrapping. A number of street loafers drew around the contestants and soon they were the center of a big throng.

Hammer and tongs the boys went at it, Terry and Dick practically back to back and standing off the other two well.

The strangers fought with entirely new tricks to our friends, and as a consequence made the two friends "hump it," as the saying is, to maintain their guard.

Suddenly the one scrapping Terry landed a vicious blow under the Irish boy's chin, and he toppled over backwards, bumping into Dick as he fell.

Wide's attention was devoted to the skillful and vicious assault of his own opponent and did not observe a new attack in his rear.

For as quick as Terry had gone down beneath the other's blow, the one who had delivered it leaped forward and caught Wide's leg with a quick jerk from behind.

The young Washington was dragged to the ground because of the suddenness of this cowardly attack from the rear.

The two toughs leaped upon Dick at the same time, and the Neptunes in the background of the fight cheered lustily.

Young Wide Awake was down and getting a beating at last!

CHAPTER IX.

PARSONS ACCUSES DICK FALSELY.

Young Wide Awake did look in a very perilous position, and in the instant that he lay there he received one or two good stiff punches in the face from his two assailants.

But the two fellows, in their anxiety to trim the sails of Young Wide Awake, forgot about the Irish lad for the instant.

Terry did not forget about them, though, and he rose to his feet right behind them, a little weakly, perhaps, but with strong determination.

"Ye cowardly curs!" cried he as he sprang toward them, and with all the force of his trained muscles he brought a ringing blow with his powerful left along the side of the first fellow's ear.

The fellow toppled over, off Wide, and with a lightning-like stroke Terry gave the other, who was facing him now as he bent over Wide, a quick, ferocious straight-arm jab right between the eyes.

The lad dropped like a shot, and Terry sprang up for the other one. This scamp had fallen over on the ground and was ruefully picking himself up with a badly torn ear.

"Come on, ye cowardly cur av a Neptune!" yelled the lad, while the crowd cheered his work lustily.

But the stranger was in no wise anxious to fight any more. He wanted the rest of that ear to stay right where it was.

"Now's our chance, Fred," murmured Gerald; "they're tired out and we can fix them!"

The two fresh Neptunes rushed into the fray now, just as Dick rose to his feet.

A blow from Fred's fist he warded off with his left shoulder, but the impact shoved him over again and he stumbled and fell!

"Hurrah!" cried Parsons, "we've got 'em going this time!"

Gerald received a stiff crack from Terry, and he lost a little of his cock-sureness of a few minutes before.

"I'll fix ye!" cried the Irish lad, and he attacked the boy with the ferocity of a game-cock. Biff! biff! bang!

A hard blow landed on Keating's neck and he stumbled and fell. With true sporting instinct Terry waited until he had risen to his feet, and then the Irish boy knocked him down again, and again.

After three trials of this method Gerald had enough and rushed into the edge of the crowd out of reach of the sham-rock fighter's fisticuffs.

Terry turned to see how Dick fared. The young Washington had stumbled, as you know, and Fred rushed upon him.

But this was no knock-out, and as he fell Dick reached up for his opponent's arms. Fred remembered this trick from once before, and held off, but our hero clutched his coat and dragged the Neptune down upon him in a jiffy.

There on the ground they rolled over, getting in short-range jabs, but doing little injury to each other.

"I'll show him a new one," thought Young Wide Awake. "Up with you!"

And by sheer strength he rose with the other fellow clasped in his sinewy arms, and coming to his knees with quickness, shoved the surprised Neptune over backwards.

Dick sprang to his feet. Then he stood at guard, and allowed the Neptune captain to rise to his feet.

"You cur!" raged Parsons, not appreciating the courtesy of the act, and rushing at our hero again. Biff! His carelessness had betrayed him, for Dick bestowed a stiff blow right between his right arm, guarding the chest, and his left guarding his face.

The delivery struck fair and square in the neck, just at the top of the chest, and the Neptune tumbled over.

The crowd fell back a little and Dick followed up his advantage with another blow as the Neptune rose.

"Back, stand back!" yelled Terry. "Give him room to smear the rascal in!"

The spectators fell back more, clear to the pavement, and Wide saw something which made a smile come to his lips. It was a big, wide horse-trough standing before the hardware store there on the corner.

"I'll teach Fred something else!" he murmured to himself, and he rushed the unhappy Neptune again.

The trough was just behind Parsons, and he stood backing away from Wide with his hands at guard.

"Look out!" bellowed Dick in a loud voice, to startle the Neptune, and with a regular football rush he made a flying rush for the fellow's knees.

This was unexpected, and he succeeded in getting a hold just above Fred's knees with both arms.

"Up!" shouted Dick, and before the startled Parsons knew what had hit him our hero had boosted him up and then dropped him over into the splashing horse-trough.

You can guess how that crowd roared and laughed, for they were not used to such comical endings to their fights.

"Ha! ha! ha!" they laughed. Terry shouted, "Good boy, Dick!"

And Wide stood off to wait for any further attentions from the captain of the Neptunes.

But answer was there none, for Fred climbed out with a scowling face, and shaking his fist at Dick, hurried out of the jeering crowd, to join Gerald and the two new Neptunes.

"Three cheers and a tiger for Young Wide Awake!" shouted one fellow in the crowd.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Whoopee!" yelled the spectators with a will.

Just then Officer Callahan came rushing up and forced his way into the crowd.

"What's all this excitement here?" he demanded.

Dick laughed, and the policeman, who was very fond of him, smiled back.

"Mr. Callahan," said he with a grin, in a tone that all could hear, "the Neptunes have two new members and Terry and I were just initiating them into the Belmont fire department."

"Yis, indade," said Terry, "and Oi want to tell you, Mr. Callahan, thot we gave thim the third degree wid every single detail!"

"You boys'd better clear away from here before we have a riot call," said Callahan, and so they all separated, and the two friends walked down the street with the officer for a block or so to tell him all about the mill.

"Thot's shure fighting after me own heart," said the policeman. "It reminds me av the good old days whin the Irish folks had wakes, back there in me ould grandfather's home."

"I didn't know they had them so bad as that," said Wide.

"Me boy," answered the officer, "Oi've seen some av the liveliest wakes ye've iver seen. And whin me poor ould grandfather doied the nayburs came for fifty miles around to show their grief. Faith, and 'twas the liveliest grief Oi've iver seen!"

And he shook his head, thinking over the happy memories.

"Oi was only a bye then av twelve, but Oi had the blude av me illustrious grandfather in me veins. Oi did up old Kelly and his son and his cousin, Pete Mulcahy—and armed only wid one whisky bottle. Thin we all wint out around the corner and cleaned out a Swede boordin'-house. Ah, thim was the happy days!"

The officer bade them farewell with a fond smile on his face and went down the side street still swinging his stick on its leather thongs and reminiscing over the good old days in McFadden's Flats.

The boys went on down to see the girls, after brushing up spick and span as if they had never heard of a street fight.

Mr. Lester came into the room with an anxious look on his face.

"Say, Dick," he began, "did you know that Parsons has stirred up a lot of trouble for you?"

"No; I don't understand," said Young Wide Awake, looking up from the piano, where he had been standing to turn the music for Kitty.

"It's very serious business. You know the older Parsons, Fred's father, is the agent for several of the biggest insurance companies in the country, for all this territory."

"Yes, Mr. Lester, I know about that, though I don't understand how he holds his job with them, for he is always up to such crooked deals throughout Belmont, and he has a bad name with every big business house here."

"Well, you see, Dick, he has the contracts for the agency, and if business men want to insure with those companies they have to give him the business whether they like or not. So there you are!"

"But what's this got to do with me?" asked Dick.

"Just this: that fellow is trying to dodge payment of the fire insurance on that burned grain warehouse and the superintendent's personal goods, which were also insured in his company. Of course, the company's officials are honest and live up to their obligations, but if legally they can get out of it they do so as a business proposition. So, they are with Parsons, particularly because of a claim he has made about you."

"What on earth can it be, father?" asked Kitty anxiously, for she knew that her father never brought up business matters at home unless they were indeed serious.

"I'd expect everything and anything from that crook," said Dick, "for he has been trying to ruin me ever since

the company was started by us boys, and his son lost the captaincy."

"Well, however that may be, Parsons has filed an accusation with the city authorities that you and the superintendent were in league to let that fire burn the place down!"

"What! The confounded lying scoundrel!" shouted Dick.

"That's my opinion of him exactly—only more so!" said Mr. Lester; "but charges are charges. He avers that the superintendent set the place on fire for the insurance, and that you and he were working together to let the place burn. As a proof he cites that you fought off the Neptune Fire Company from the hose-plug and wouldn't let them use it, and thus delayed the stream of water on the fire about ten minutes!"

"That's the worst I ever heard in my life," raged Dick, "and I'll make him suffer for that or know the reason why!"

"Remember that he has the law on his side, Dick," said his friend, "for he has filed the action and you and the superintendent, Wilson, whose daughter you saved, are the defendants, and the State has to prosecute you!"

Dick was absolutely dumfounded.

"What shall I do?" asked Dick. "This is such a surprise and such an attack in the dark that I don't know where to turn."

"I think we'd better call up your friend, the chief of the fire department, for he is always with you, and he can help directly more than any one else. This case was just filed in court the very last thing this afternoon, and Parsons is trying to keep it secret until it is sprung on the public through to-morrow morning's papers. I learned it through my friend, Will Poole, who is clerk of the court."

"We can steal a little march on them, then," said Dick, "and I'll call up Chief Pelton, as you advise."

The chief was soon on the wire, and the young captain made an engagement for Mr. Lester and himself to call up and see the official within the next hour.

"You'd better drop into headquarters of the police department, and I'll be waiting for you there. There's a little news on the subject of that breaking into the Holmes Street engine-house. Good-by."

Wide and his older friend were soon on their way to headquarters. Dick had stayed for supper with the Lesters, and bade Kitty good-night with the usual sweet kiss.

It was quite dark, and they walked along the shady streets quietly, for the most time in the shadow, because of the heavy foliage of the trees.

"I'll stop in the drug-store and 'phone Hal to keep low on the subject of that engine-house affair until we act on it. I had a sort of engagement with him to-night, anyway," said Wide.

"All right, I'll walk on slowly," said Mr. Lester.

They were in a rather bad part of the town now, for there were many low saloons in the neighborhood, and a tough element frequented them.

Dick entered the little ramble-shamble drug-store and inquired for the pay telephone.

"It's back of the prescription counter," said the clerk, who was lounging in a chair in the front door.

"All right, I'll find it," said Dick, and he went back of the counter. The number was busy, and he waited a moment.

As he stood there in the shelter of the green screen of glass which you see in every little drug-store, almost, two familiar figures entered the drug-store.

The fellows spoke to the clerk familiarly and came on in to get a light for their cigarettes at the little alcohol lamp standing on the cigar-case, very near the prescription counter.

It was the couple of new Neptunes whom Dick had trounced a few hours before! Evidently they belonged in this very neighborhood.

"Say, Henny, that lobster can cert scrap, can't he?" said the one whose ear was bandaged up from Terry's blow.

"Dey both can," said the other; "but we're hunk wit' 'em, I guess. Gee! but we did fix up deir old engine-house fer 'em dat night!"

"Sshhhh!" said the other cautiously; "don't talk so loud!"

"Aw, dey ain't no one around here, anyway, dat's wise! Say, how do you s'posen dat bunch got dat new hose so quick? Dey was on de job wid dat warehouse fire, and we didn't expect 'em, neider!"

"Sure, dere was sompen dopey about it ennyway. Dey stacked de cards on us. We nearly lost out on dat warehouse fire, didn't we?"

"Well, it burnt down, anyway, and dat was what we wanted!"

Dick was startled—this was evidence that the fire was an incendiary one after all!

He dodged down behind the counter, and just in time, for, as luck would have it, one of the fellows, whom the other addressed as Henny, looked around the edge to see that there were no listeners.

Dick was out of sight, and so he turned back.

"Here's fifty bucks, and we each gits half, Pike," said Henny; "but mum's de word! I think we can work de old gink fer some more of dis later on wen de case gets a little warmer."

"Sure," said Pike; "but don't you fergit it's half and half alike right along!"

"All right! But, say, dat old guy is running into pretty dangerous channels now. If I was him I'd be mighty keer-

ful—and his son is in pretty deep, too. But dey know deir own business!"

Dick was hoping they would name the party, but they were too shrewd. He noticed that they mentioned a son. Then it couldn't be the superintendent after all.

"I wonder if it could be old man Parsons?" he thought to himself. Then he listened intently for more information.

"Dis is a bad biz; and say, Henny, I'm goin' ter beat it fer New York as soon as we git dis other deal fixed up. Dis town is too small. Dere ain't enough money and dere's too blamed little chance to hide around after a good job."

"Well, we ain't in it fer our health, anyway, so we might as well get down to de best location, and dat is cert New York."

"Time's shooting along, Henny; let's be gettin' down to meet Cullen. To-night's de night fer dat little yegg biz in de offices of de Brockport & Northern, so let's be gettin' down."

"Great Scott!" thought Wide to himself. "That's Mr. Lester's railroad, and they're planning a robbery of some sort. How can I get out to warn him?"

"Well, Cullen's to meet us here," said Henny, "so we might as well be comfy and wait inside here wit' de evening paper. Sit down and make yerself at home, Pike."

The two fellows pulled up chairs and sat down directly in front of the drug-store.

"Holy smoke! I'm trapped! For if I get out that way they'll see and recognize me!"

Dick scratched his head vainly for an idea.

Just then the telephone bell rang loudly, for the central operator had found his number and was ringing him up to connect him.

The bell jingled and jingled, and Dick dared not answer it, for the two crooks would hear his voice.

The clerk, hearing the bell, started up and entered the door to reply himself, thinking his customer had gone long ago.

"The jig's up!" thought Dick to himself in despair.

CHAPTER X.

DICK FIGHTING THE SAFE-CRACKERS.

Young Wide Awake's heart sank within him, and the clerk came nearer and nearer. Dick knew that he would speak, and the plot of the crooks would never be thwarted, only delayed.

He looked to his right and saw a half-open window into a side street, and quick as a flash he made his mind up that he would take a desperate chance.

There is a trick which nearly all boys know called "dry diving." It consists in diving headlong on the ground or floor, and is generally done over chairs or tables or gymnastic apparatus.

Just as the diver hits the ground he draws his head well down against his chest, catches himself with his hands and rolls unharmed over in a sort of somersault, rising to his feet.

It is a clever trick, and difficult to learn, yet simple when accomplished by a good acrobat.

Well, Wide had learned the stunt in the Belmont gymnasium, and with a leap toward the window he essayed it. There was only the space of perhaps twenty inches between the sill and the lower part of the window, and our hero had seen that it was impossible to climb out without opening it up further.

"Here goes!" he thought, as he sailed through the air and then through the narrow space with nicety.

The ground was soft outside, fortunately, with no hard stone pavement, and our hero landed skillfully on his hands, rolled over, and was on his feet and scurrying down after Mr. Lester in a jiffy.

The drug-store clerk had passed around the other end of the screen and was talking to the two fellows, so none of the three had seen the youth's hasty and unusual exit.

Wide hurried down the street and soon was with his friend.

"Say, I learned an awful lot in there!" he exclaimed breathlessly. "There is to be an attempted robbery in your railroad office to-night, so let's hurry to police headquarters and tell Connors."

"What do you mean, Dick? Are you demented?" asked Mr. Lester, who could not grasp the situation. "Why, boy, you're all over mud!"

"I don't care! Hurry down to the station—we must run!"

So, his friend humoring him, they set out at hot speed, although it must be confessed that Mr. Lester thought the young fire captain had lost his mind.

As they rushed up the steps of police headquarters, the fire chief walked up, too.

"Where's Connors?" yelled Dick.

"Here, my boy, here—why, calm yourself!" said the assistant chief of police.

"Well, I haven't time! I overheard a plot to rob the safe of the Brockport & Northern Railroad, and there's just time to head the robbers off now!"

"What's that!" exclaimed Connors. "How do you know this?"

"I overheard a talk between two of the fellows who are going to do the job and they are waiting for the third!"

"Well, then, we shall head them off!" cried the official.

"Quick, sergeant, you and Callahan and a couple more policemen, follow me." They all rushed out to the street, including Mr. Lester and the fire chief.

"This is quick work, whatever it may mean!" grunted Lester as they all clambered into a carriage which the chief forced into service.

"Well, if Wide says it's so, I know it is," said Pelton, with confidence in his young fire-laddie.

"Whip up, there, driver, down to the Brockport & Northern office!" called Mr. Lester, giving the street number of the big building.

It was late in the evening, and the streets were almost deserted.

"Take us around to a side entrance, if there is any," said Connors.

The driver went toward the door indicated by Mr. Lester, and then the carriage drew up, and the load of policemen and others piled out.

"I've a key to this private entrance," said the railroad magnate as he went toward the door. In a twinkling he had opened the entrance, and they all filed in.

Up the darkened stairs they groped after him, and soon they were in the big treasurer's room of the railroad.

"There, against that wall, is the safe," said Mr. Lester, pointing with a little dark-lantern which Connors handed him.

"Now, we'll catch these fellows in the act, so all of you men distribute around behind the doors of this partition and inside these two coat closets."

Connor's directions were obeyed, and Dick and Mr. Lester were handed spare revolvers by Connors, in case of need.

The young captain and his friend hid in the wash-room, right off the office, and Lester bolted the door softly.

"Now they can't get in, and I'll work a surprise on them, with the electric switch, when they get to work."

It was a tiresome wait of nearly half an hour before they heard suspicious noises in the hallway.

"That's the alleyway window, and I thought that the bolts on the windows along that side of the house were burglar-proof," said the railroad man.

"I guess they're like most fire-proof buildings," said Dick. "They are the exceptions which prove the rule!"

"Ssshh!" cautioned the chief of police from his place back of a heavy, dark curtain in the corner.

Tick-tick! The instruments of the burglars could be heard working.

Up the stairs came the first of the gang of three, for the window had been softly but skillfully opened.

"Dis way, culls," he said. "We's got de whole field to ourselves!"

Little did he realize the humor of the remark, considering

the armed men waiting in hiding to pounce on them in the name of the law.

"Hurry up, Henny, wid dem tools!"

"All right, Cullen, but ye know I ain't no porter on a railroad train, so don't ye go bossin' me. We's all in dis, share an' share alike!"

"Cut out de high talk!" said the one addressed as Cullen. "Now, get down to work, fellers, 'cause we ain't goin' to stay long in dis town!"

"No," thought Dick Halstead, "the penitentiary of this State is in another town!" and he smiled to himself in the dark.

"Say, culls, dis will be a peach of a getaway if dat old bloke of a Lester has left any dope in de safe. He's such a fly guy himself dat I reckon he'll have it salted away himself. Dey're all crooks in business nowadays!"

This enraged Mr. Lester, who could hardly hold back from rushing out upon them. But Dick laid a restraining hand on his arm and the angry railroad man bided his time.

"I guess dat Parsons is de slickest of de gang, dough," said Cullen. "He told me de udder day dat he was goin' to fix dis Lester guy. I didn't let on dat we wuz going to do it fust."

He was working away at the safe, and the other three were helping, Henny holding a dark lantern. They were so sure of their work that they had not even worn masks.

"Say, we's even wit' dat Neptune bunch, too—dey t'ought we wuz kids and easy guys, and dat dey could work us for good t'ings to do deir dirty work. But dey gets an-udder guess!" said Pike.

"How's dat?" asked Cullen, resting for a minute.

"Oh, dey got us into dat baby fire company of deirs to set up a job on one of de udder kid companies, and we put deir house on de gimbo! But den they t'ought we was goin' to be human punchin'-bags fer dat Young Wide Awake. He certainly is a good prize-fighter sp'iled in de makin'."

"What did you do?" asked Cullen.

"Well, we fixed de odder house and went down to dat fire at de warehouse, but it's too hard work fer mine—give me a nice, easy life of safe-crackin'! We just barely got out alive from dat warehouse fire, 'cause we fixed it ourselves. Den to-night, jist before we came down, we made a little touch on de Neptunes dere, and I bagged t'ree watches and Henny got a little roll of money from de locker-room."

"Well, you fellows are certainly making a hot trail behind you," grunted Cullen. "Dat's de trouble wid young crooks, dey always tries to overdo de game and gets bitten!"

"We're goin' to leave to-night on de two o'clock freight, so wot de dickens do we care?" laughed Pike. "We ain't no angels!"

"Well, keep yer hands outer fire-brand games, dat's my advice," said Cullen. "What'd you do it for?"

"Oh, dat's tellin'!" laughed Henny; "but we got fifty dollars fer it!"

"Well, we're ready fer de explosion now—get back!"

The men started away and Cullen leaned to light the fuse, but suddenly a loud voice called out:

"Hands up, you crooks, in the name of the law!"

It was the voice of Connors, who stepped out from his curtain with a revolver in either hand!

Bang! bang! The desperado called Cullen had shot twice directly at the assistant chief.

A limp hand dropped and his revolver fell to the floor from his grasp—the brave officer had been wounded in one hand. But his other was in fighting trim, and he whirled around and fired point-blank at the robber's legs, inflicting a painful but not dangerous wound.

Cullen fell, cursing and shooting a wild shot at Connors again.

The other two sprang for the door, intent only on their own safety, but Callahan and the sergeant sprang out.

Pike pulled out a revolver, but the sergeant brought his night-stick down across the wrist with a sudden crack that broke a bone.

He grasped the struggling thief with the other hand.

Henny ran towards the front entrance, and Cullen kept up his firing.

"Watch 'em, now!" said Mr. Lester, and he flashed the electric lights on the whole big office.

Henny was the swiftest of the three, and he made a leap for the door which Lester and Dick opened.

He carried a heavy blackjack in his hand, and with it he struck viciously at our hero.

But Wide jumped aside and delivered a return compliment with terrific force on the side of the fellow's jaw, and down he staggered to his knees.

He pulled out a revolver and fired point-blank, but Wide was too close upon him to get a good aim.

Dick grabbed the rascal by the throat, and in a jiffy they were tussling on the floor.

Two of the other policemen ran up, though, and all three of the miscreants were soon bound and led downstairs to the patrol, which had been ordered by the sergeant over the 'phone.

"That's a good night's work, Dick," said Mr. Lester; "and I think we cleared up a lot of your trouble at the same time, too."

CHAPTER XI.

DICK SPRINGS A SURPRISE ON PARSONS.

The next day the papers were filled with the accusations of the insurance man against Dick Halstead, and the matter was the talk of the town.

When Wide went down to the Holmes Street engine-house the Washington boys were there in force.

"What does this fresh outrage mean, Wide?" demanded the boys wrathfully.

"What do you mean?" asked Young Wide Awake, pretending blissful ignorance of the whole matter.

"Why, just look at this!" shouted Tommy Grogan, holding up a copy of the morning paper.

There, in big headlines, was a long article, with Dick's picture at the head of the column, and a picture of the insurance man.

"My gracious, but see the fine company I am keeping," said Dick with a laugh, and then with the greatest of composure he started reading the paper.

INSURANCE COMPANY ACCUSES YOUNG FIREMAN!
Captain of Washington No. 1 Company is Declared to be
in Plot of Incendiary!!

That is the way the headlines began, and you can imagine the rest. Dick read every word and then looked up at the wondering boys with a smile.

"Well, what do you think of it, Wide?" asked Joe Darrell.

"Think—think," answered Dick. "Well, I just know that I have our genial friend and adviser Parsons tied to the track on that matter!"

"In what way? What is the game?" asked the boys eagerly.

"That's just it—it is a game, and it was all put up on us!"

"Tell us, Dick. You are stingy with your news!"

"Well," answered Young Wide Awake, "you boys will see later what I mean, but I can tell you this, that I have Mr. Parsons right where I want him. That article is libel, and I can sue him for damages, and you just bet I will, if Mr. Lester advises it."

Mr. Lester did advise it, for he was calling Young Wide Awake up on the 'phone in a few minutes.

"Hello, Dick!" said he over the wire. "Did you see the newspaper to-day?"

"You bet I did," answered Wide, "and what do you think of it?"

"Well, I just happen to know that that article ought to be good for about \$500 damages from the newspaper that printed it, without verification, and about \$500 from our esteemed fellow-townsmen, Mr. Parsons!"

"That's what I thought, and hoped," said Dick. "When are we to finish up the matter in court before the magistrate?"

"Right this afternoon," answered Mr. Lester, "so you just go after Kitty and bring her down to lunch with me at

the Belmont Hotel, and then we'll all go visiting on the magistrate."

This they did, and the little luncheon party was very happy, for Dick knew that things were coming his way, as the saying goes.

"What is the case of these gentlemen?" asked the magistrate, looking over his glasses at the three bandaged burglars.

"Your honor," said Connors, who carried a bandaged hand himself, and glared at Cullen in particular, "they are burglars, were caught in the act, and were further guilty of resisting officers of the law."

"A very serious charge!" said the magistrate, signing the papers of their commitment.

"Furthermore, your honor, they attacked me with intent to kill, and succeeded in getting as far as my wrist, and I want that added to the charge," said Connors.

The crooks just glared back at him angrily.

"It shall be done, Mr. Connors," said the magistrate with a suspicion of a smile. "Anything else?" he inquired politely, as he handed the papers to his clerk.

"Yes, your honor," said Connors; "these two pleasant-faced lads here," and he pointed to Henny and Pike, "are the ones who set fire to that grain warehouse, from their own confession!"

The judge sat up straight with surprise. The two crooks started in surprise, for they had forgotten about their talk on the subject.

"What's this? Is this true?" asked the magistrate.

"It's a lie, yer honor," said Henny, bowing carpingly.

"Sure, it is, jedge," said Pike, with another scrape.

"Your honor," said Connors, interrupting, "the three policemen, the sergeant and Mr. Lester here, and young Dick Halstead, all were present in the room just before we made our capture. We heard them talking about the whole matter."

"Then I will have papers made out for them on that charge," said the magistrate. "There have been complaints filed by a Mr. Parsons against this young Halstead, and I will quash that case."

At the mention of Parsons' name the two younger crooks exchanged hurried looks with each other.

The judge saw this and called the bailiff of the court.

"John, I want you to go around to Mr. Parsons' office and ask him to step here at once—it's only a short walk there. Now, hurry!"

The bailiff did as directed, and while he was gone the judge busily scribbled out some papers which he showed to Connors and the clerk, conversing in a low voice.

There was an excited murmur in the court-room, and many eyes were directed towards Young Wide Awake, who

was well known. Every one in the room felt that more interesting developments were to take place soon.

Parsons came hurrying into the room, looking worried, for he had been summoned to that very court-room not so very long before, and it had fared far from well with him.

"What is it, your honor?" he asked. "Do you want some additional information in my complaint against Dick Halstead and the superintendent of that grain elevator?"

"Yes, sir!" roared the judge, with a fierce glance of his steely gray eyes at the insurance man.

"Well, sir, don't take my head off about it," answered the insurance man with insolence, for he saw that there was some new and unfavorable element in the case. "I am the plaintiff, and not the defendant in the case, please to remember that!"

The judge leaned over the desk and glared at him. "I am not so sure about that, after all!" he snarled.

Turning quickly to the two crooks who were still standing on the bridge, by the side of Cullen, he called out quickly:

"Do you two rascals know this man?"

The two fellows looked up guiltily and were about to speak, then held their tongues.

Parsons' face was a study. He turned pale, then red, and the veins in his neck swelled up as if they would burst, but he held control of himself and said never a word.

The two men looked at him, and shook their heads slowly, with a peculiar look on their faces.

"Never saw him before!" said they. Parsons breathed easier.

"Do you swear to that?" asked the judge tartly, for he had hoped to surprise them into exposing the relations he suspected.

But the two fellows were on their guard now.

"Never a peek, your honor, I swear!" said Henny.

"So do I!" said Pike. So the magistrate had to let it pass.

"Are you trying to implicate me in some mess, sir?" asked Parsons angrily.

"I am!" answered the judge, "but I'll make these men suffer the full penalty for their secretiveness. They'll get enough years in the penitentiary to give them time to think over their deeds."

"You can't catch me in any of these little things," answered Parsons; "and if it wasn't for the contempt of court law I'd give some of my opinions of you, sir!"

He turned on his heel, but the judge raised his hand, while the spectators in the room were breathless with interest.

"Just a moment, Mr. Parsons," said the judge. "There is another little matter. These young gentlemen have been

trapped into testifying that they set fire to the grain elevator themselves."

Parsons whirled around, glaring at the two fellows.

"Never fear, sir, they are too honest as crooks to betray any third person," and the judge looked keenly at Parsons.

"But their words are sufficient justification for me to enter a new case against them, and to dismiss the one against Dick Halstead."

"How can you? The other has not been tried!" cried Parsons angrily, seeing his scheme falling through.

"I can on my authority as magistrate of this court, and I am responsible only to my higher authorities on the bench of this county and State. I don't allow a sharp insurance man to dictate to me."

Parsons turned on his heel and beheld Dick Halstead grinning at him.

"Your turn is coming, young man!" he said angrily.

"Yes, I've got a libel suit against you!" said Dick with a laugh.

Just as Parsons turned towards him, the judge faced the three prisoners and said: "You are each remanded to the criminal court, where you will get absolutely the limit punishment. You will try to shield a third party again!"

Henny turned towards the court-room, where Parsons was standing just by the door, and sent a farewell shot after the insurance man.

"Your honor, we might as well get what's comin' to us now, an' then we will collect a little when we get out! Silence pays!"

He looked straight at Parsons, and every one in the court-room knew what he meant.

"It's a pity we have no real connecting evidence to fix that man with," said Mr. Lester to Dick, as Parsons hurried from the room with reddened face.

"Yes, Mr. Lester, but some day we'll get our opportunity, you just see!"

"Next case!" said the bailiff, and the routine of the court-room proceeded.

Dick, Kitty and Mr. Lester left and they all passed a jolly evening, with a number of the Washington lads and their sweethearts dropping in on the Lesters.

It was a regular jubilation party, for they all felt that they had squared accounts with Parsons for some time to come.

Next day the chief hunted up Wide.

"I want you to come up to my place this afternoon, Dick," said he. "I am going to bring up Fred Parsons for participating in that rough-house which put the Washington's engine-house to the bad."

"I hope you can fix him for good," said Dick.

"No, I can't do anything very strong, because his father

you know. And, besides, we have only the bare outline of the plot, for those three crooks will not say another word."

"What do you think is their game, Chief Pelton?" asked Young Wide Awake curiously.

"Just that they will come back and blackmail old Parsons when they do get out of prison. They can send him up to the penitentiary with a single word, for there's no doubt in any one's mind but that he was the one who paid them to set fire to the warehouse that evening."

"But they didn't mention any names, and there's no other evidence, is there?" asked Wide.

"That's just it, my boy, just it. He's certainly a wise old owl!" said Pelton with a laugh.

"Those fellows will bleed him for a lot of money some day, and I will be glad of it," said Dick. "It serves him right. Just as he has treated others so will he get his own reward some day."

"Well, my lad, be up at the place at three this afternoon, just by yourself, as I wouldn't like the story of this to get around Belmont. I think I can scare Fred Parsons into good behavior."

"All right, chief," said Dick; "you'll behold me bright and early."

He went down to the engine-house and helped the boys set things in order, for the machines needed constant attention and looking after.

"We never know when we will be called upon for an all-day fight," said the young captain, "and so I want everything to be ready for the tussle with the flames."

"What about that matter of the cut hose and broken ladders, Dick?" asked Hal. "What has ever been done about that?"

Dick had kept the matter to himself for the last few days, but now he deemed it time to let the boys in on his chance discovery.

"I just knew it was the Neptunes," said Tommy after he had related the whole matter to them.

"Well, we're to get even with them this afternoon," said Dick, "for I am going down to the chief's office now."

"What will you do?" asked Terry.

"I don't know what, but I think the chief is going to scare Fred with a threat of exposure of the whole thing. So far only we, the police, Mr. Lester and the chief know about this part of it, for we kept hushed on the matter in the court."

"Good work!" said Tommy. "Now we'll have them at a disadvantage!"

Dick went down to the chief's office at the appointed time and saw Fred Parsons sitting there, uncomfortable, ahead of him.

The Neptune's captain was too impolite to speak to Dick, which amused our hero, under the circumstances.

"Good-afternoon, chief," said Dick pleasantly to Pelton, who was sitting back at his desk calmly smoking a pipe, with his feet cocked up on the drawer at the top.

"Boys, I have called you together to put an end to a certain little game that has been going on for some time," said the chief.

Fred looked red, and Dick looked pleased, but neither interrupted.

The chief continued:

"You boys have both done good work fighting the fires in Belmont with your respective companies, and I want to give you the credit you deserve. But there is a canker inside the rose. In other words, you have spoiled it by too much scrapping and squabbling!"

"It's not been our fault," cried Fred; "we only defend our own rights!"

"Now, young man, don't you interrupt, and you'll save yourself a lot of trouble! I haven't particularized on either name, and I leave it only to the guilty conscience. There's one company which has behaved itself and the other which has done some low-down things!"

"Well?" snarled Fred, seeing how cleverly the chief was dangling him before Dick, and feeling degraded more than if there had been an actual call-down with names.

"It isn't well," said the chief, "it's very, very bad! Now, things have got to stop. I happen to know that one company took in two tough fellows just to have them rough-house the building and equipment of the other company!"

Fred turned even redder and squirmed silently in his seat.

"I am not mentioning any names, but I know all about it. Now, the city equipment replenished those damaged hose and ladders, just in the nick of time. The other company has to produce the money with which to reimburse the city for that destruction or else I will let the public know how one fire company endangers the lives of the citizens by such cowardly pettiness!"

The chief's anger was getting the better of him now, and he roared the words out.

"Furthermore, the other company has to send to me direct a check to the account of the other company for \$50 to pay for the damage done to the chairs and furniture of the latter company. That is very small, but it is a little step towards retribution. If this is not done by Saturday noon there will be a scandal in the Sunday paper that will make Belmont sit up and take notice. Just mark my words!"

Fred was glaring angrily out of the window, but there was nothing for him to say.

"That's all," said the chief. "You can now go back to your companies and tell them what I said. Remember, I mentioned no names—but I know the names, and the public

will if there is any more of the past contemptible actions, scrapping and squabbling like a bunch of gutter-snipes!"

The chief whirled around in his chair and went to shuffling some papers in his desk.

"Good-afternoon, boys; now get along, because I'm very busy!"

The two boys went silently out of his office, and as Dick went past the chief's desk Pelton looked up at him with a large, eloquent wink.

Dick winked back again and went on out, and down to the Holmes Street engine-house.

You can guess the wild whoops of joy and satisfaction which greeted his announcement when he broke the news to the lads. Not a detail of the humorous situation escaped him, and he dwelt upon the changing expression of Fred Parsons' face.

"Now, we will have time and opportunity to give our undivided time to the fire service, boys!" said Wide with pleasure in his voice.

"Yes, and I'm glad of it, for one," said Hal. "I'm tired of this business of scrapping all the time."

"Shure, and me, too, Pete," said the Irish boy. "Oi don't mind a good mill now and then—it makes a fellow's eyes sparkle and kapes the circulation av the blood good. But there's too much av a good thing, you know!"

"That's right, boys," said Young Wide Awake. "Now let's celebrate our victory over the Neptunes by starting practice with the new fire-hooks which the city has presented to us."

So they had a peaceful celebration with the hooks, and they learned some skillful maneuvers which stood them in good stead at the very next big fire they went to—but that's another story!

Meanwhile, Fred Parsons had gone home and told his father about the decision of the chief.

"Well, there's no doubt about it, that rascally Pelton knows a lot more than is good for us! Now, if I give you this money, will you promise to lay low for a month or two? Then you can fix Wide if a certain plan of my own works out favorably. I must get even with that young upstart, or he will be the ruination of me."

"I agree with you, father," said Fred Parsons; "but we must be foxy for a while. This continual scrapping does give us away too badly."

"Yes, my boy, old as I am I can learn a few things. Did you know that young rascal has instituted proceedings, through Lester's lawyer, against me for libel in giving that ease to the papers? He'll never get it, however; still I fear I was too hasty."

Parsons was wrong in his guess, however, for Dick did win the libel suit, and it was the talk of the town for several weeks. He won \$500 from the newspaper and \$500 from

Parsons, and the neat little sum was very welcome, as you can guess.

The paper had made the mistake of putting in as facts things which were only claimed, while Parsons had lost his head and run in a lot of his venomous words about Dick. Courts are none too easy with such offenders, and the insurance man had quite a large bill to add to the account of Young Wide Awake.

But it worried Dick Halstead never a bit.

"Some day, Kitty, I am going to college," he said, "but meanwhile I'll save every cent I can and do the very best I know with the work which comes up here from day to day in fighting fires."

"Well, Dick," said his little sweetheart proudly, "you have done wonders here lately. You have fought fire and have won, and you've fought wealthy and desperate enemies and have won there! So here's a medal for my hero!"

Can you guess what the medal was?

It was not pinned on Dick's breast, nor on his coat lapel, but right square on his mouth!

The three desperate fellows, Henny, Pike and Cullen, were each given stern sentences to the penitentiary, and by the end of the week the money had been forwarded to the chief for the cost of the destroyed hose and furniture.

Old Parsons pursued his way bitterly, but he had entered on a new policy with regard to Young Wide Awake.

"It's easy to see," said Dick to Hal, "that the insurance man is laying for me. But meanwhile we've beat him at his own game, and I'm ready with both eyes open for any further tricks."

It was well that Dick was not fooled by the quiet of his enemies, for they were indeed of that kind which never forgives nor forgets until the end of life!

THE END.

The next number of "Wide Awake Weekly" is an eye-opener! It is one of the snappiest stories that has ever come from the pen of Robert Lennox, the leading fire-story writer of the world. "YOUNG WIDE AWAKE'S SWIFT RUN; OR, SAVING THE MIDNIGHT EXPRESS," is the name of this story. It is a tale of baffled bandits, a new kind of fire-fighting, and shows Wide and his friends in new feats of daring! Don't miss it! Number 135! Out next week!

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CHOICE READING MATTER.

To read of an inhabited subterranean city seems strange, yet a place of this character actually exists in Galicia, Austrian Poland, and with a population, too, of over 1,000 men, women and children. It is called the City of the Salt Mines, and has a town hall and a church. The latter has several statues, all of which are carved from rock salt.

The latest French invention is a musical bed. It is said to be warranted to cure the most confirmed victim of insomnia, and to produce sleep on stormy or hot nights far more effectually than any narcotic. The subject lies down and with his foot releases a spring which sets a music box in motion. The apparatus begins to grind out sweet lullabies and melodies. It is said that the inventors of this novelty will be able to utilize the works of many composers whose pieces are never performed.

Fixed in all our military and social customs and living at the base of language itself are two facts which solve the riddle and make clear whence and how right-handedness arose. In all tribes and countries since man used implements of offense and defense, the sinistral or cardiac side was protected by the shield, and the sinistral hand was called the shield hand, as the dextral was called the spear hand. Next to fighting and contemporary with it was the need of barter. Now, the fundamental condition of bartering was counting with the low numbers, one to ten. The fingers of the free or dextral hand were, naturally, first used, and all fingers are today called digits, as are the fingers themselves, while the basis of our numberings is the decimal or ten-fingered system. The tally-stick, notched or numbered, is the record of the digits held in the air. Every drill and action of the soldier, from Xenophon to West Point, is dextral in every detail. The dominancy of the right eye is shown in firing from the right shoulder and sighting with the right eye.

"Tom" Speedy, the Liberton naturalist, has "delivered judgment" in the Scotsman on a lot of interesting correspondence concerning rats. The statement that the progeny of a single pair of rats will in three years increase to 656,808 should, he says, be accepted with the proverbial pinch of salt. As the result of observation, Mr. Speedy declares that fifteen was the largest brood he had ever seen and four the smallest. Seven was the average of those he kept in confinement. The young are born blind, and it is fourteen days before they can see. A month later they are displaced by another brood, and they are driven from the nursery to fend for themselves. Frequently only one female is found in a brood, and this in a large measure must check the geometrical tendency to increase. What becomes of so many young bachelor rats Mr. Speedy does not state. It is asserted that old males, when opportunity offers, destroy young broods, but of this Mr.

Speedy has no knowledge. This he does know, that the mother rat keeps the old male away from her brood in confinement.

When Mrs. Balsam started downtown shopping she asked Mr. Balsam if he could think of anything he wanted. "I certainly can," said Balsam, with the irritability of a rheumatic invalid, "but you can't get it for me." "Why can't I?" she asked. "Because it's a razor I want," he growled, "and no woman can buy a decent razor." Mrs. Balsam refrained then from expatiating on the ability or the inability of her sex to judge of the good points of that tonsorial instrument; nevertheless she bought a razor. Mr. Balsam objected to using it on the ground that since she bought it he knew it was worthless, and was therefore likely to cause him to cut his own throat, but since it was the only razor at hand he was overruled by her arguments and finally consented to shave himself. "How do you like the razor?" asked Mrs. Balsam. For some time Mr. Balsam obstinately refused to express an honest opinion, but justice at last compelled him to say: "Mighty fine razor. Best I ever had. Who picked it out for you?" "I selected it myself," said Mrs. Balsam. "The clerk assured me that many women are excellent judges of razors, and that it is quite common for them to buy razors for their men relations and friends. He thinks they come by their knowledge of razors through their experience with kitchen and dining-room cutlery." "Don't believe it," said Mr. Balsam, still obstinate. "At this rate they'll be telling us next that women are good judges of neckties and cigars."

RIB TICKLERS.

Friend—And what is your new novel about? Novelist—Oh, I couldn't tell you that. You see the publishers are going to offer a prize to any one who discovers the plot.

"Mrs. Blank is a perfect crank on the care of her clothes." "I should say so. I met her yesterday, and she was fearfully roiled up because she's been caught out in a storm in her new raincoat."

New Woman—Simply because a woman marries a man is no reason why she should take his name. Old Bachelor—Just so. The poor fellow ought to be allowed to keep something he can call his own.

Friend of the Family—You are lucky, my boy, to be the seventh son. It will bring you everlasting fortune. Son No. 7—It hasn't so far. All it's brought me yet is the old clothes of my six brothers.

Friend—Why don't you come to our fashionable church, instead of attending that little one around the corner? Nucummer—Can't afford it. Friend—But salvation is as free at our church as at the other one. Nucummer—Maybe it is, but the pew rent is different.

Fellow Passenger—Pardon me, your necktie has been sticking out for some time. I refrained from telling you sooner because those young ladies seemed so much amused. Farmer—Thankee; an' the oil from that lamp has been dropping on that light overcoat o' yours for the last ten minutes; but every one seemed so tickled that I hated to spoil the fun.

The first reported ill effect of the discharge from service of the white mice of the British navy occurred on July 25, when the crew of No. 9 torpedo boat was overcome by escaping petrol fumes and, when rescued, found unconscious, though later resuscitated. It had been the custom until recently for British submarines to carry white mice, peculiarly susceptible to the fumes of petrol. Their squeaking serves as a warning in the case of an accident like the recent one. Several weeks ago the British Admiralty ordered that the mice should be carried no longer.

The Hidden Treasure

By John Sherman.

The Manton Manor House was a queer old building, and had at one time deserved its title; but, alas! the manor had grown smaller and smaller with succeeding generations, and at the time when my story opens consisted merely of the house itself and a few acres of land surrounding it.

The house was built by my great-grandfather, Sir William Manton, and stood at that time some years in the midst of a large estate.

Sir William was reported to have brought an almost fabulous amount of treasure with him when he left England to seek a home in America.

However, with the exception of the estate and a few hundred pounds in gold, no property could be found by his executors after his death.

When the Revolution broke out he espoused the cause of his adopted country, and died fighting.

He was a widower, with an only son, and this son, my grandfather, inherited all the property.

My grandfather was a free liver, and fond of company, so that when he died, leaving my father sole heir to the property, the estate had already shrunk in size to a marked degree.

My father inherited all of my grandfather's fondness for entertaining, and the estate melted away rapidly.

I was sent to college, and afterward educated for the bar, as my grandfather and father had been before me; but, unlike them, I immediately entered upon the practice of my profession; and at the time at which my story opens had succeeded in obtaining a small practice, and was supporting myself in a modest way.

I used often to run down from the city on Saturday night, and spend Sunday at the dear old place.

My mother had been dead many years, and old Nancy, who had been my nurse, now acted as housekeeper for my father, who for several years had been a confirmed invalid.

The thought of the treasure, which a legend of the family asserted my great-grandfather had buried at the outbreak of the Revolution, always had a great charm for me.

The old house was built with thick walls and a high, peaked roof.

Succeeding owners had added additions, as their needs or fancy had dictated, from time to time, and the result was one of those queer old rambling houses, with steps leading up here and down there, with queer closets and unexpected crannies everywhere.

Many a quiet Sunday afternoon have I passed sitting in a window-seat, and allowing my fancy full scope.

The lost treasure formed the principal topic around which my thoughts centered. My father could tell me nothing about it, and he even doubted the truth of the legend.

With my romantic nature, inherited from my mother, I clung tenaciously to my belief in the story.

One morning, when I entered my office, I found a telegram awaiting me, which had arrived only a few minutes before.

It was as follows:

"Come home immediately. Father very ill.

"NANCY."

I took the first train, and in a few hours was at Manton Manor.

That night my father breathed his last, and I was left alone, with no near relatives in the world.

It was several weeks ere I recovered from the shock of my father's death sufficiently to permit of my looking into his affairs at all.

When I did so I found that the property was heavily mortgaged, and I saw no way of saving the dear old home where I had passed so many happy days.

During his lifetime my father had manifested one peculiarity, about which I had often twitted him.

He was never known to destroy a letter, but each one was carefully labeled and put away in an old desk, which tradition said had once belonged to Sir William.

It was a curious piece of furniture, made entirely of mahogany, and elaborately carved.

One day I sat down at this desk to look over my father's papers.

They consisted of old letters, receipted bills, canceled notes, old checks, and various other papers of no value.

Finally, my eye was attracted by a package of paper, yellow with age, and tied with an old piece of faded ribbon.

Untying the parcel, I examined the contents.

The papers consisted of letters written by my great-grandmother to Sir William before their marriage.

How they had come to be preserved so long I do not know, but for some reason they had never been opened, apparently, since Sir William had tied them up.

As I was taking one of the letters out of its envelope a piece of paper fluttered out and fell upon the desk.

Taking it up, I read these words:

"Search the desk."

The writing was not in the same hand as the letters, but was evidently that of a man.

My heart gave a bound, and almost stopped beating, as a thought came into my mind.

Was I about to get on the track of the hidden treasure at last?

What else could this have reference to?

At any rate, I would search the desk. I at once began, and searched every corner and nook of the queer old piece of furniture.

After I had pulled the last drawer out of its place, and sat pondering what I should do next, I unconsciously put my hand into the place left vacant by its withdrawal, and began drumming with my fingers.

Much to my surprise, the back of the space fell forward upon my knuckles, revealing a recess at the back of the desk.

Looking into the recess thus disclosed to view, I perceived something white, which I immediately withdrew.

It proved to be a piece of parchment covered with writing.

Turning to the light, I proceeded to decipher the document, which, much to my surprise, contained directions for finding a secret passage in the wall, which would lead to a hidden room, wherein, the document stated, the writer (Sir William Manton) had deposited a box containing a large amount of treasure, "being in fear of ye approach of ye English troops, and desiring to preserve ye treasure for ye use of ye writer's son and his heirs."

The directions, translated into modern English, were as follows:

"Starting from the hall door, measure along the floor in a straight line twenty feet; then at a point directly opposite this, on the right-hand wall, three feet from the floor, press upon the wall, when a panel will slide back, revealing a flight of spiral steps leading up through the wall.

"Follow these steps to the top, where they apparently end at a stone wall.

"Count three layers of stones up from the landing, and the same number to the left of the right-hand corner of the recess. Here you will find a small, smoothly-dressed stone, by pressing which a door will open before you.

"Passing through this door, you will find yourself in a small room, in which is the box containing the treasure."

The reader may imagine the state of excitement into which this communication threw me.

Were my boyhood's dreams of this hidden treasure to be realized at last?

I could hardly believe that I was not dreaming, and had to read the memorandum over three or four times before I could convince myself that my imagination was not playing me a trick.

At the bottom of the piece of parchment was the sentence: "Remember the family motto."

The meaning of this was not clear to me, but as it seemed

not to have any bearing upon the other contents of the document, I dismissed it from my mind.

Procuring a tape-measure, with trembling hands I measured off twenty feet on the floor, and then measuring three feet from the right-hand wall, beginning at a point opposite the termination of the line, I tried to find the spring.

My efforts were in vain.

Thinking that my measurements might have been inaccurate, I tried again, and failed.

After several ineffectual attempts, I sat down to study the document.

Had I misunderstood it? No. There were the directions in plain black and white. Reading over the paper carefully, the last sentence caught my eye.

Hitherto, as I have said, I had overlooked this as having no bearing on the subject: "Remember the family motto."

How the sentence seemed to stand out from the parchment.

The family motto! What was it? It consisted only of three words, "Tried by fire." I wrote the words down, the better to study them: "Tried by fire."

Suddenly a thought came into my mind:

Why not try this piece of parchment by fire?

I advanced to the fireplace, and held the parchment between my eyes and the fire. As the heat began to affect it, I saw, to my astonishment, between the third and fourth lines, these words appear:

"Side of the large mirror, the frame of which is set into the——"

This, then, was the meaning of that mysterious sentence.

This line had been written in a sympathetic ink, which became legible only when subject to heat.

The precaution had evidently been adopted to prevent a stranger, who would, of course, be ignorant of the family motto, from making use of the paper.

With this correction the paper read as follows:

"Starting from the hall door, measure along the floor, in a straight line, twenty feet. Then, at a point opposite this, on the right-hand side of the large mirror, the frame of which is set into the wall three feet from the floor, press upon the wall, when a panel will slide back, revealing a flight of spiral stairs leading up through the wall."

The mirror referred to was not in the right-hand wall, but in the left-hand one, so that a person without the key would try, as I had, to find the panel in the wrong part of the room, and thus the secret would be safe from discovery.

Following the directions as corrected, I pressed upon a nail-head which I found at the right-hand side of the mirror, when the whole frame swung back, revealing the flight of stairs.

Lighting a candle, I mounted these, and found myself confronted by a blank wall.

Again referring to the directions, I easily found the stone indicated, and giving it a vigorous push, the wall seemed to move back, and a rush of cold, musty-smelling air almost extinguished my candle.

Stepping through the opening, I found myself in a small room, which seemed to have been fitted up as a bedroom.

At one side stood an old bedstead, with mattress and bed-clothes complete, but the latter so yellow and moth-eaten that I could hardly decide what materials they were made of.

An old-fashioned chest of drawers and a washstand completed the furniture of the room.

Searching the room, I found at one side, just under the bed, a small iron chest, which was so heavy that I could hardly lift it.

It was securely locked, but on the wall, by the chest of drawers, I found an old rusty key, which fitted the lock.

After several efforts I succeeded in turning the key in the lock and raising the lid.

I started back with an exclamation of amazement. There before me lay the wealth which Sir William had brought with him to his adopted country.

In a tray lay numbers of diamonds and precious stones of all kinds, while beneath were numerous bags filled with gold coins.

I thus found myself almost in an instant changed from a poor, struggling lawyer to a wealthy capitalist.

The next day I removed the treasure to a safe place, and ere long the mortgage was paid off, the old place once more free, and I had a snug fortune invested in good securities.

I have since married, and as I sit, in the long winter evenings, in the dear old library, with my wife and children around me, the little ones never tire of the story of the paper which I found in my great-grandfather's desk.

The zoo keeper carefully unfolded a small paper packet which looked as if it might contain a headache powder. "Want a rattlesnake's tooth?" he inquired. "Tooth?" "Well, call it a fang, if you want to, but ain't there something in the Good Book about 'sharper than a serpent's tooth'?" "Look at this one, and you'll think that the old fellow that wrote that must have known what he was talking about." He opened the paper and showed what seemed like a miniature horn. It was shaped like a cow horn which has only one curve. It was yellowish white, like a discolored tooth. It was about three-quarters of an inch long and a sixteenth of an inch in diameter at the base, where it seemed as if it had been broken off. The point was as sharp as a needle. An eighth of an inch back of the point, on the outer curve of the tooth, was an opening, the end of a sort of tube which ran the whole length of the tooth. This little channel through the tooth seemed to be full of a dried substance, which the zoo keeper evidently regarded with proper suspicion, for he warned the recipient of the tooth to handle the same with care. He did not think that one would get a true case of snake bite from one of these discarded teeth, but if the skin should be scratched or pierced by it a bad sore would probably result. According to him, the keepers at the zoo often pick up these loose teeth in the snake cages. They are apparently shed in the course of natural changes, something as the serpent sheds his skin. They are not merely the snake's baby teeth, for he sheds them more than once.

That formidable weapon known as the bowie knife is attributed to the inventiveness of Colonel James Bowie, a famous frontiersman, who was born in Logan County, Ky., in 1796. He took an active part in the revolution of 1829-30, and was killed in the battle of the Alamo. Some of the most famous bowie knives were made in San Francisco by Martin Price. His first attempt was exhibited in 1858 in the first Mechanics' Fair held in that city. After the fair, Ward Eaton took the knife to the Bank Exchange and raffled it off for one hundred and fifty dollars. Up to that time the most famous knives on the coast had been made by Billy Allison of Yolo. Surveyor-General Higley possessed an Allison knife, which he backed against the Price weapon. Laying a half-dollar on the counter, the General drove his knife clear through the coin without turning the point. Ward immediately duplicated the feat. Higley then tried two half-dollars, but the point of his knife turned. Eaton piled up three of the coins, and impaled them upon his blade without turning the point. Price's bowie knives became as famous on the Pacific Coast as Toledo blades were in Spain. No man could be considered "well heeled" without one. Marion Moore, a noted mining and sporting man, ordered the best knife that Price could make. He gave the latter a gold brick and a piece of gold quartz, and told him to work the metal in. Price made an eight-inch bowie, with a gold handle inlaid with quartz. Moore paid one hundred and seventy-five dollars for the weapon, and in addition handed back to Price the gold that was left over. At the same time Moore's lawyer, McCabe, secured a gold-mounted knife for one hundred dollars. In 1861 Price made two knives for Colonel Jack Gamble, who supplied Mexican gold onzas for the handle frames. The handles were inlaid with abalone shell and gold quartz. The Colonel paid four hundred dollars for them. The first big knives made by Price were for a party of United States surveyors, who wanted them as substitutes for axes in cutting trails through the brush. The blades were twelve inches long and exceedingly heavy, and could cut off a man's head at a blow.

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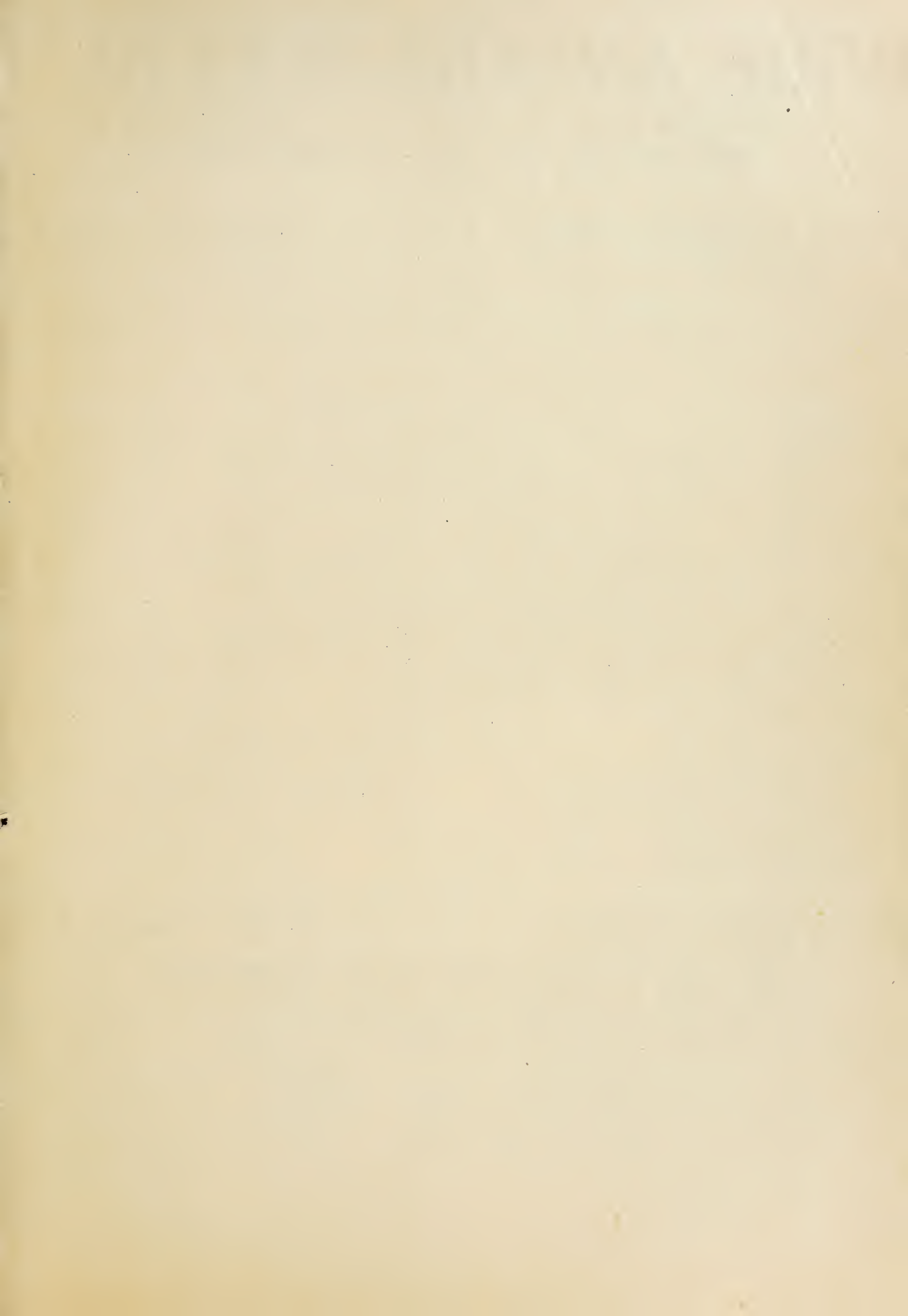
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